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ABSTRACT

The suggestions, discussions, examples, and tips presented in this handbook are intended to help educators improve their public relations (PR) and communications skills. The first of the book's six chapters introduces the need for a written communications policy, good PR, regular communications, and feedback from audiences. The chapter's appendices provide examples of PR policy statements and a form for organizing meeting results. Chapter 2 discusses finding the right audience, inside or outside the school system, and targeting appropriate information to them. Public opinion polling is covered in chapter 3, which explains how to do surveys and offers examples of sampling strategies and questionnaires. Chapter 4 covers working with the mass media and outlines a six-step process for getting out news releases. Publications planning, formats, copy preparation, type faces and sizes, and artwork are examined in chapter 5, while the last chapter gives suggestions for handling PR in crisis situations. Attached to the handbook are 40 "tip sheets" from the National School Public Relations Association presenting PR ideas and projects involving newsletters, teacher PR skills, student handbooks, telephone surveys, annual reports, and many other topics. (RW)

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PR: ESSENTIALLY ESSENTIAL

...the MISD Communication Team Training Handbook

EA 014 710

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The Macomb Intermediate School District is a service organization. Its employees provide support, special help and special equipment to local educators in all of Macomb County's 21 school districts.

About one-third of the staff serves constituent educators from the Educational Service Center at 44001 Garfield Road. Except for the staff at three Continuing Education for Youth programs, the balance of our employees work in MISD programs and schools for the handicapped.

PR: ESSENTIALLY ESSENTIAL

According to the American Management Association, management has four components: writing, speaking, human relations and management skills.

Three of the components are communication... and the fourth--management skills--cannot be separated from an individual's capacity to communicate.

Perhaps these are the considerations which led consultant Peter Drucker to call communication the essence of management.

The MISD's Communication Team Training Program was designed to help key educators strengthen their writing, speaking, human relations and management skills. Our goal has been to improve the communication capabilities of key educators... to involve more people in the telling of the school story... to improve staff and public understanding of the educational enterprise.

This handbook addresses the basics of school communication. It begins with six chapters on the essentials, and continues with a series of tip sheets on a variety of specific topics. As the training program continues the MISD will provide additional materials so Macomb County educators face the big job of building better understanding with the best information available.

William J. Banach, Ed.D.
Administrative Assistant

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PUBLIC RELATIONS: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Edward H. Moore (Edited by Dr. William J. Banach),
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HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

Public relations--like it or not, you have it!

This brief handbook was designed to help you improve the PR you already have... and to help you take steps into areas of communication that may be new.

Read the handbook with a pencil. Think about your school or program as you review the contents. Then jot notes in the margin when you find material that relates to you.

Feel free to brainstorm with yourself as you progress. Stop at the end of each section, and ask, "What's in here that I can use?" Then make notes.

When you've finished the handbook, type all your notes, do some editing, and--odds are--you'll have something that eludes most educators--a written PR program.

INTRODUCTION

The Bumps, Bruises and Contusions of Educational Communication

The concept of educational communication came about as a result of the financial havoc during the great Depression of the 1930s. With money tight, the tax-man's knife started taking wider and wider swipes at the nation's schools in an effort to reduce costs and lessen the burden on the nation's hard-pressed tax-payers.

Over the past 50 years, educational communication has followed a winding course that now appears, in many ways, to have brought us back to where we started.

The scenario is a chilly one. The baby boom has burst, leaving schools-hurriedly built just a few years ago--standing empty. A greying population is shifting political priorities toward caring for the mature rather than the maturing. Stagnating productivity has left the nation's leaders to deal with the dilemma of more and more groups clamoring for a greater slice of an economic pie that has stopped growing.

Increasingly, education is falling between the cross-hairs of those aiming to blast away at government spending considered out-of-control.

It can be effectively argued that many of the challenges facing education are rooted in funding mechanisms that are inherently unjust and antiquated.

In many states, public elections on educational financing are among the few opportunities an average voter gets to shout, "No," and vent his rage at increasing tax demands.

But the problem is more profound than a simple disagreement with the way we pay for education. Voucher initiatives that have appeared on ballots in several states seem to suggest that, for some of the public anyway, it's not only time to restructure educational funding, it's time to restructure entirely the way educators go about doing business.

Why is public support of the nation's schools continually declining? Why do finance elections fail even when educational services long considered basic are at stake? What has happened in this nation that once proudly bally hooed its schools and everyone's right to a free and complete education?

In the arena of public opinion, education has many partners that have faced similar challenges. The past few years have seen record profits for the nation's oil companies. The profits brought public cries of profiteering. And the cries resulted in a barrage of advocacy advertising to explain those profits.

Chemical companies under the gun for possibly threatening the public's health and welfare have responded with messages like, "Without chemicals, life itself would be impossible." One chemical company has even taken the pains to train its employees, from the executive suite to the factory docks, to act as company spokespersons. Armed with facts and figures about the industry, the employees are equipped to intelligently speak out, whether at a Rotary luncheon or neighborhood barbecue, when someone starts maligning the industry.

Tactics such as these are nuts-and-bolts solutions based on the keystone axiom of the communication profession: People will not support that which they do not understand.

It is in this nuts-and-bolts spirit that this guide has been developed. The local community is the testing track of communication theory. It behooves educators to be the mechanics, as well as the engineers, of communication practices.

Educational communication is taking place right now, whether we want it to or not, whether we initiated it or not. We hear statements like...

— Why is it costing more to run the schools each year even though the number of students keeps declining?

— We're spending more than ever on education so why are we graduating legions of illiterates?

— We never had guidance counselors when I went to school and I survived, so why do we need them now?...

These statements—and others like them—are heard at monthly board of education meetings, in the lobby of the local post office, and at barbershops, bars and supermarkets.

That's where nuts-and-bolts communication takes place. And that's where many educators have been getting their bumps, bruises and contusions of educational communication.

Chapter 1

Getting Started

Who's in charge here?

To be successful, a communication program first needs commitment, then a system, and, finally, guarantees of consistency.

An administrative commitment to communication sets the record straight at the outset. It provides those charged with carrying out the program with guidelines and goals. And it offers tangible evidence to the public that the intention is genuine.

A communication commitment, or policy, will provide a vital buffer for the communication program, helping it withstand inevitable changes in personnel and politics. And it will insure that communication will continue just as thoroughly when the news is bad as it did when the news was good.

The commitment to communication should be a written one, and it should be adopted by the governing body of the institution it affects.

Because of the wide variety of educational systems and agencies, there is no single formula that provides a guideline for the development of such a policy. But, any communication policy should be uniquely developed by the institution following a careful study of the institution´s goals, philosophy, and audiences as well as the laws to which the institution must conform.

There are also certain elements that should be addressed in any written communication policy. Along with aligning the communication program with the institution´s goals and philosophy, the policy should define the communication program´s purpose, outline a program for action, assign priorities and responsibilities, and provide for input from the audiences it will affect.

Without a written policy, the communication program is apt to fall into the brush fire system of communicating only when a situation or event demands attention.

But tossing buckets of information on problems only after there´s visible smoke will not provide the communication program with the system it demands for success.

A communication program must provide a systematic and two-way flow of information that is on-going.

Too often, educators can be found guilty of practicing a band-aid approach to communicating, rushing to the informational medicine chest only after the pain of public criticism or indifference becomes unbearable.

To build a communication program, educators should first consider their publics. Publics are not one large group of people "out there" who ought to be told something about their schools. Instead, individual groups tied by common bonds of location, background, interests or desires must be considered on singular planes.

A typical school district should identify both its internal and external publics. (Detailed information on identifying publics follows in Chapter 2.)

Identifying publics and shoveling information their way is only the beginning - not the end- of a communication program. To be truly responsive and effective, a program's informational process must be two-way.

Information filters down from the top of the administrative structure. The system is complete when a mechanism exists to allow for the unrestricted flow of information in the opposite direction as well. It is in this phase where many communication programs suffer from serious design flaws.

A "feedback" mechanism, where all groups can have their say, is often seen as a Pandora's Box by administrators. And its hidden evils, they profess, are better left under cover.

But a pack of angry parents, accompanied by television news crews, appearing without notice in your main lobby, or a sudden student sit-in protesting some new rule change, can quickly convert even the most die-hard "hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil" subscriber.

Aside from the obvious political and social mandates to allow for community participation in the decision-making and information process, allowing for input from all levels of your organization is simply good management sense. //

Unfortunately, the obvious feedback devices usually suffer from a time-honored role that has relegated them to a perfunctory performance category. The age-old suggestion box holds great potential but too often sits unemptied and collecting dust. In such a situation, the suggestion box becomes a standing joke among those who should be using it. And that impression may easily translate to other, more responsive, two-way communication plans you develop.

Other devices that provide for a two-way communication system include:

— Internal and external advisory committees. The worst time to form an advisory committee is when you absolutely need one. While it may not be advisable to form a "forever" advisory committee that is perpetually ready to invade any topic it feels needs to be addressed, short term committees should be investigating areas important, or potentially important, to the institution.

Any committee formed should be provided with a schedule, timeline and sunset date. It should be given a specific charge. Its members should be selected so they represent those who may ultimately be affected by the committee's action. Committee membership should not be a landing strip for frequent critics or fervent supporters. Also, the committee should be informed of staff persons who will be allocated time to assist in the committee's undertakings.

— Opinion samples. Properly constructed opinion samples provide the dependable framework on which a communication program can be built. But there are many hidden dangers.

Opinion sampling is a science and, as such, must be respected totally to avoid mistreatment. To many, "sampling" simply involves scribbling out some questions and contacting a large group to take the pulse of the community.

Thorough brainstorming sessions must inspect every possible area of information needed before the results of such a study can be relied on. In one eastern school district, for example, all information collected in a pre-election survey indicated that an upcoming bonding election to provide for an addition to a middle school would be comfortably approved by the voters. On election day, however, the request was rejected.

Disappointed school officials at first blamed the defeat on a negative article appearing in a newspaper the day before the election. But a follow-up opinion study revealed that voters rejected the bond request because they disliked the design of the planned addition.

The pre-election polling had been biased by the school officials' preconceived notions of what they believed the voters would be concerned about-- money. But, as the survey showed, the voters were not troubled by the cost of the addition. They agreed, through their questionnaires, that the addition was needed. But the survey at no point allowed them to report their dissatisfaction with the building's design.

A second election followed public displays of a new, improved design, and at a follow-up election the proposed addition was approved.

Opinion samples are not cure-alls for educational communication ills. A once-a-year, every-year survey that asks about everything from what color to paint crosswalks to the need for a gifted program may provide the overall input to spark discussions. But such a survey will not provide the detail and subtleties needed to implement policy. A major survey, then, is only the starting block. It must be supported with additional detailed follow-up.

(For more information on opinion sampling, see Chapter 3.)

— Meetings. In most areas, changes in the laws have opened meetings of public institutions to the public. But attendance without participation can crate a breeding ground for distrust and disgust.

Most institutions provide a mechanism for input during regular meetings by setting aside a time at the opening or closing or through a special request channel. For those attending meetings on a regular basis, such a system is fine. For those who appear when it's time to get something off their collective chests, a regulated system may appear as a method of restricting public input.

A brochure, outlining the speaking procedures, as well as the responsibilities of the body which is meeting, should be standard equipment at any meeting. Available at the outset, the brochure clues in new visitors on the procedures for doing business and avoids embarrassing the new attendees by making them feel like outsiders. (For more information on publications, see Chapter 4.)

But aside from the formal method of presentations to governing bodies, far too much communication potential is wasted during formal and informal meetings held by educational institutions.

Meetings should be a communicator's paradise. (At the outset, the communicator will usually find a captive audience eager to listen.)

Any meeting, public or not, should be planned with objectives and results taking high priorities. Objectives should be set before the meeting convenes. During the meeting, those attending should list actions to be taken as results of the meeting. (See meeting planner diagram at the end of this chapter.)

Public meetings should showcase interesting projects or programs underway within the institution. Whenever possible, the presentation should include children.

— Community meetings. Informal, community get-togethers are usually organized after an institution has been faced with a new challenge and feels the need to communicate directly with its publics. Meetings in neighborhoods and homes throughout the community are a powerful tool in the communication arsenal. They allow for face-to-face communication where attitude development and opinion changing can and does take place. And they offer a situation for unbridled input from citizens who feel at home in familiar surroundings.

School officials, however, will return to their desks licking their wounds and feeling like they've been tossed to the lions if not properly prepared before venturing out into the community.

First, school officials armed only with a speech may find themselves hopelessly lost when the questions start flying after the presentation. To assure effective presentations, school officials should:

- Brief and train all of their speakers on the ancillary kinds of questions that may be sparked. The speakers should also not fear saying, "I don't know but I'll get back to you," as long as they do follow up as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours.

- Develop a question and answer brochure that will address many of the general kinds of questions that can be expected.

o Realize that not all school officials are cut out for public presentations. (Respect your audience by keeping your monotone staffers home in the office.)

o Hold regular de-briefing sessions among your speakers where commonly asked questions can be discussed and other feedback can be assorted and considered.

o Promote meetings properly to assure that those attending get what they came for and those presenting are not mired down in concerns unrelated to the issue at hand. No amount of proper promotion will prevent the possibility of someone showing up at a budget review meeting to complain about the lack of a stop light at Twelfth and Main. But proper promotion will hopefully keep that kind of situation to a minimum.

o Talk in concrete terms about the subject, avoiding the lung-puffing gobbledygook that often invades educational discussions. Any audience will appreciate frankness.

— Speakers Bureaus. Informal community meetings are a good way to get face-to-face communication and instant community feedback. Too often, however, these meetings revolve around times of need and the community may rightfully grow tired of seeing educational officials appear only with hat-in-hand.

Any educational organization has among its staff members a wealth of education, experience and interests that can translate into a wide variety of presentations for interested community groups.

The single most vital factor in offering the services of a speakers bureau is that it provides continuing face-to-face communication with the publics on a wide variety of topics.

At a time of declining enrollment, when fewer and fewer community families are exposed to the educational system, it also provides for a continuation of contact with schools and schooling.

— Telephones. Ringing telephones can be good friends or vicious enemies in a communication program. Ask your switchboard operator about feedback the morning after an unpopular administrative decision and you'll get an earful.

Every incoming call has a public relations element. The way calls are answered, how questions are responded to, and the ease with which calls are transferred and information is tracked down all affect public opinion toward an institution.

But unfortunately, for educational support personnel, public contact training is often limited to the hiring interview where the command, "We need someone who knows how to be courteous" is stated.

Being courteous is a crucial element in public contact positions. But an institution's support staff has other vital roles in the overall communication program.

Many support staff are on the front line when the public tries to attain something from the institution. They answer the calls. And they answer the angry second calls after someone has neglected to "get back" to a caller as promised.

What these employees say, how they say it, and when they say it, all figure into the communication mix.

Along with training its professional personnel in the techniques of educational communications, educational instutions should extend that training to its secretarial and other support staff. The training sessions should highlight the important role all school employees play in the communication program.

To aid in the collection of feedback, a log of incoming questions should be maintained by the switchboard operator and periodically evaluated to determine if the communication program should be used to address the most frequent inquiries.

Typically, the word "communication" conjurs up visions of news releases and newsletters, and they are essential elements in any communication program. But it's obvious that communication vehicles such as these must be supplemented with methods that are face-to-face, methods that allow for listening as well as talking, and methods that are coordinated to be ongoing.

A thorough understanding of the workings of communication shows the need for consistency. Consistent communication will build the credibility needed for effectiveness. Along with consistency, the communication must be:

- - planned with results in mind
- - ongoing for effectiveness
- - two-way to be accepted
- - alert to changing audiences and their interests
- - evaluated to assess successes and study failures

APPENDICES

Chapter 1

Appendix A

COMMUNICATION POLICY

Formulating policies and procedures is "one of those jobs." Administrators often despise it, school employees see little need for it, and board members readily move it to the bottom of the agenda.

But policy is important. Someone once said, "If you don't have a policy for it, it is either illegal or immoral." That may be a bit extreme. Yet communication policy is the rudder of the ship.

Most importantly, realistic policies set the tone for communication in your school district. They let people know that you are committed to more effective public relations.

Next, policies help you formalize your communication plan. They provide direction for what has to happen.

And, finally, procedures help you convert good thoughts into action. They let people know what is expected, and who is responsible for what.

The following pages contain communication policy and procedure excerpts. They are offered as a guide as you begin working to convert your good communication intentions into action.

POLICY STATEMENTS

COMMUNICATION PHILOSOPHY

The Board of Education of the DISTRICT recognizes its responsibility to provide its many publics with information about DISTRICT schools, programs, activities and services.

Through written, oral and visual media, these publics can better understand the goals of the DISTRICT and gain a deeper appreciation of the efforts being made to provide quality education for all students.

This can be accomplished through analysis of our publics, planning of communication activities and dissemination of information which will reflect the policies of the board, the achievements of the staff and students, the various activities in the schools and the services provided by the DISTRICT.

In order to build better understanding of the DISTRICT, its programs and services, continuing efforts will be made to improve and increase internal and external lines of two-way communication with all DISTRICT publics.

PUBLIC'S RIGHT TO KNOW

The Board of Education supports the right of the public to know about the programs and services of the DISTRICT, and will encourage all efforts to disseminate appropriate information about the institution, its people and programs. It is the responsibility of each school, department, program and staff member to facilitate communication by helping all news media representatives obtain non-confidential information as accurately, quickly and conveniently as possible.

INFORMATION PROGRAM

The Board of Education believes that greater understanding of the DISTRICT stems from planned and systematic, two-way continuous communication with its publics.

NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS

In order to assist in the communication of information, impartial relationships shall be maintained by the DISTRICT with the news media and their representatives.

The Board of Education encourages the superintendent and staff to make information available to news media and the public. Information shall be available at reasonable times and under reasonable circumstances, except such information, the release of which, would constitute a violation of an individual right of privacy and good business practice.

NEWS RELEASES

The superintendent, or designee, will be the news liaison person for coordinating the release of information concerning the DISTRICT and actions of the Board. The principal of each school, or designee, will be responsible for maintaining liaison with media representatives for the dissemination of information relating to that school.

The use of all media is encouraged for keeping the public continuously informed about DISTRICT programming and activities of public interest.

BOARD MEETING NEWS COVERAGE

It shall be the policy of the Board to extend an open welcome to the representatives of the news media to attend all board meetings.

Press releases and other information instruments shall emanate from the office of the superintendent of schools.

NEWS CONFERENCES AND INTERVIEWS

The Board of Education believes that news conferences and media interviews should be conducted when a DISTRICT program or service has significance to the public.

The superintendent shall approve each employee speaking on behalf of the DISTRICT; the principal shall approve each staff member speaking on behalf of a particular school. The Department of Communication Services shall be involved in planning all news conferences and media interviews.

SCHOOL OR PROGRAM SPONSORED INFORMATION MEDIA

The Board of Education believes in providing its publics with clear and concise information about its schools, programs and services on a continuous basis. This information shall serve to increase the public's knowledge and understanding of the DISTRICT.

Publications and other information documents/materials shall be published periodically to supply information and interpret policies, long- and short-term goals and objectives, planning and management of district operations and education programs, activities and services.

Educational programs and operations of the DISTRICT should maintain communications with parents and other publics affected by their services so that those persons may become acquainted with that particular program and the DISTRICT as viewed through that particular program or service.

VISITORS TO DISTRICT PROGRAMS

It is the policy of the DISTRICT to welcome visitors to its program. Visitations shall be conducted in such a manner that students' educational programs are not disrupted.

PROCEDURE STATEMENTS

VISITORS TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The DISTRICT welcomes visitors to its school programs, and appreciates the opportunity to explain the programs and services available to handicapped students.

The following procedures are intended to help make all visitations educationally worthwhile while avoiding disruption of student learning.

ALL VISITORS

All visitors to schools are requested to report first to the principal's office.

PARENTS

Parents are invited to contact or visit the building principal or assistant principal at any time. However, scheduling an appointment in advance will insure adequate time will be set aside for such visitations.

STUDENTS

Students interested in visitations of an educational nature are encouraged to meet with staff members after the regular student day or plan to spend a minimum of one-half day in planned inservice visitation. Arrangements for such visitations can be made with the building principal in advance.

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS

Educators are requested to make advance appointments for visitations to assure that proper staff and time commitments can be made for visitation.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETINGS

1. The secretary, or his designee, shall make available to citizens attending Board meetings, the following:
   a. Copies of the agenda.
   b. A brochure providing information about the DISTRICT and the functioning of the Board.
   c. An inquiry card to be signed by those citizens who wish to be heard.
2. Section II of the agenda of regular meetings (communications from citizens on the agenda) will be reserved for those citizens who wish to appear on the agenda. Such citizens shall make their

wishes known in writing to the superintendent. He shall schedule them into the agenda of a regular meeting as soon as possible and feasible. He shall inform them that their presentation will be limited to five (5) minutes unless otherwise extended by the board president.

3. Citizens present who wish to be heard, but who are not on the agenda, will be provided for in Section V of the agenda. In order to be recognized by the president, they shall complete an inquiry card.
4. In those cases where either the size of a delegation requesting to be heard, or the length of the presentation will inhibit the Board from completing its agenda, the superintendent shall confer with the president in arranging an appropriate time and place for a special meeting.

Chapter 1

Appendix B

MEETING PLANNER

DATE OF MEETING: ____________ CALLED BY: ____________

TIME: ____________ PLACE: ____________

COMPLETE PRIOR TO MEETING

OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING:

RANDOM IDEAS PRIOR TO MEETING:

COMPLETE DURING MEETING

WHAT I'LL DO AFTER THE MEETING:	WHEN

BEFORE THE END OF THE MEETING REACH AGREEMENT ON WHAT YOU WILL DO AND WHEN YOU WILL DO IT.

Chapter 2

Finding Your Audience

Are you listening to me?

Communication attempts often follow the shotgun approach to disseminating information. Through general announcements, community newsletters or public meetings, a volley of information is released scattershot and everyone hopes it finds its targets.

To make sure the right information finds the right audiences, a communication program should recognize that its audiences exist in two broad categories: internal and external.

Since it is commonly believed that the outside public (that is, those in the community), is ultimately responsible for the funding and operation of an educational institution, communication programs often assign high priorities to their external publics, leaving the internal publics to pick up information where they may.

But because of the ways the external public perceives the thoughts, comments and actions of the institution's internal publics, a communication program should, in fact, assign high communication priorities to those WITHIN the institution.

Each member of an institution's internal public plays a key role in the vital face-to-face communications that shape community opinions. The internal population daily marches into the community with first-hand accounts of what is going on "in there" that will be accepted as fact by those who listen. "It must be true," the community will reason. "After all, they work there!

Consider the misinformation that could spread through a community when:

- A teacher, upset because his request for new texts was turned down for financial reasons, complains to his neighbor that, "They found enough money to hire three new coaches at the high school."

- A bus driver, upset because half-day sessions interfere with her normal routine, complains to her hairdresser that, "Those teachers spend more time out of the classroom than in it."

- A vendor making a delivery is shocked to peer into a classroom and see children sitting on the floor and painting all over what appear to be textbooks. He dominates the table's conversation at the next Kiwanis meeting arguing that, "It's no wonder children have no respect for anything anymore if that's what our schools train them to do."

Each of these persons has an inside experience that, combined with an insufficient amount of information, will result in erroneous reports and rumors floating about the community.

In these instances, it should be the responsibility of the communication program to:

- Inform the internal publics of budget considerations, especially in times of funding shifts that may result in unfortunate cuts in some areas while allowing for expansion in others.

- Alert all personnel to the need for and design of professional development activities, especially when the activities will result in a disruption of the normal work-flow. The institution might also consider the expansion of professional development activities to go beyond the traditional instructor-administrator roles to include all support personnel as well.

- Insure that experimental and non-traditional programs are explained thoroughly to everyone who might come in contact with them, being certain to go beyond informing just the instructors and parents involved.
The dissemination of this information might include not only the visiting vendor shocked at first glance but also a custodian who might be faced with out-of-the-ordinary chores

at the end of the school day or security monitors challenged with a continuing parade of youngsters heading for lavatories to clean their paint covered hands.

A shotgun approach to informing an institution's internal publics may be used for information of interest to all individuals through internal publications.

It is crucial to consider, however, that an audience will treat information in relation to the benefit it perceives.

In simple terms: Distribute a wordy, 10-page memo titled, "New Parking Regulations" and most likely many potential readers will file it in a pile somewhere, getting around to its contents when time permits. But distribute a wordy, 10-page memo titled,"Guidelines for a 20 percent Pay Cut Among All Staff" and it will be read on the spot.

Getting the low-down on new parking regulations doesn't offer benefits sufficent to most readers to prompt them to wade through the 10 page document. But the details of a 20 percent pay cut will be read again and again.

Unfortunately, not all communication challenges are as easy to classify as Parking Regulations vs. Pay Cuts. And not all information vital to the understanding needed in a communication program will interest all of the program's audiences.

Internal publics should be broken down by the communication program into the sub-group having different levels of informational needs and desires.

These same considerations should be addressed when defining the audiences and informational needs of an institution's external publics as well. Given the social, economic and educational diversity in many communities, the task of identifying external audiences is often more demanding.

Traditional audience groups may be found in many communities. But the communication program must take caution to carefully evalute the group on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis.

Examples of audience quirks that might have to be considered on a community-by-community basis could include:

— New residents with children have been traditionally considered supporters of their new community's schools. But if they move into the community only after a dissatisfaction with the schools in their previous community they might not take kindly to new programs or procedures that seem to foreshadow the situations from which they have just retreated.

— Concerned citizens who organize a recall of School Board officials after hearing through the grapevine that the Board plans to convert an empty school into a rehabilitation center for criminals.

— Demonstrating taxpayers who demand the rejection of a multi-million dollar budget because of a $30,000 salary for the Board secretary. "No secretary should make that much, no matter how fast she types," the demonstrators charge.

The first instance, with new residents who have fled an educational system they viewed as bad, points to the need for two-way communication with all groups in the communication program (see Chapter 1). Molding an institution's operating philosophy mandates an on-going dialog and cooperation among all groups affected by the operation. While it's neighborly to offer new residents on the block some lunch on moving day, the school system too should greet its newcomers with information and assistance they'll need during the difficult adjustment process.

In the second situation, with concerned citizens organizing a Board recall based on information from the grapevine, the communication program will have to step in and start operating where it should have been already communicating. For the most part, pressure groups that spring up in an attempt to halt a decided upon course of action are symptoms of a communication program that is not working. According to The School and Community Relations (Kindred, Bagin and Gallagher, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976), pressure groups "usually take a name that includes the word citizens or taxpayers, often combined with the word concerned, to inform the public that this is a group that wishes to confront the school system on some issue or issues."

In one respect, pressure groups are offering the public an information alternative to the "company line" that can be expected from the school system. The institution may be forced again and again to substantiate its claims while the pressure group is not. Attempts by school officials to force substantiation of claims from the pressure group will be viewed as persecution of the rabble-rousers in a classic underdog-overdog struggle where everyone traditionally roots for the underdog.

Obviously, preventive medicine is the best path for institutions faced with possible pressure group confrontations. Honest, open and two-way communication operating before the confrontations can be relied on by both the institution and the community.

It's important to also recognize that information accepted by the community will not always follow the standard lines of authority set up in an organizational chart. In a typical community school district, the superintendent would seem to be the best source for dependable information. After all, the superintendent is running the show, so the superintendent should know what's going on, right? Not always.

Information coming from recognized school officials may be treated as tainted by some in the community who believe the biases and self-interests of those school officials are coloring the information.

Obviously, one ongoing policy for school officials to strictly follow is to be as truthful and accurate as possible when releasing information to the public. No matter how innocent the situation might be, a school official who is caught releasing misleading or untruthful information can be pronounced dead as an effective communicator and that official will continue to be an albatross for the communication program every time he opens his mouth in the future. Even non-debatable statements such as, "The earth is round", will be questioned by the public if credibility is lost.

Because of this credibility challenge, the informing of internal publics takes on, again, a supreme importance in the communication program. A school superintendent can make nightly speeches in the community for two months urging the passage of a needed new tax. But those speeches will be worthless if other school employees, not properly informed of the new tax need, roam the community doubting its worth.

In the third scenario, where taxpayers threaten the approval of an entire budget because of the Board secretary's salary, the language of education, crucial in any communication program, is to blame.

In this case the secretary should obviously be given a title that is more in line with the responsibilities of the position. But there are other instances where language common to education sparks strange looks when uttered in public.

Many schools have faculty lounges that should be more aptly titled faculty workrooms. Terms that puff up what is described should be deflated in the interest of brevity. Aquatic facilities should be re-named swimming pools, cooking stations should be referred to as stoves, and learning resource centers should return to being libraries, to cite only a few.

The communication program must function to provide the basic kinds of information that will interest both the internal and external populations and at the same time identify and respond to the unique communication needs of sub-groups within both populations.

But simply identifying those individual groups is not an end in this ongoing process. While determining who would like to receive what information, the communication program must also identify the means through which information is most likely to be received.

The axiom that it doesn't pay to re-invent the wheel holds true in a communication program. If studies show that a majority of an external public group receives much of its information through a daily newspaper, then it would seem reasonable to continue that process and disseminate information through that medium. But a communication program should not become dependent on a single medium or method of communication.

Many studies show that parents in a community receive information about their schools from, in varying orders of priority, children, newspapers, television and radio, school publications, neighbors, school employees, and social and service group gatherings. Studies of non-parents report information arriving through the same means but the order of priorities is often drastically different.

Parents, of course, most often mention children as their primary source of school information. Just as the TV networks give parents a nightly wrap-up of events around the world, the young, budding "news communicators" in your classrooms provide the same service, announcing the daily school report to families tuned in at dinner tables throughout the community.

A common game in elementary school classrooms is to start a tale at one side of the room and then whisper it from student to student, comparing the tale that reaches the final student with the tale that was started. Usually, two starkly different versions appear. In the classroom it's a game. In the community it's not. But in both cases an important lesson in communication can be learned.

The human nature forces, including personal biases and preconceived prejudices, often color a story in the communication process to reinforce previously held beliefs. There's no way an educational institution can hope to control what its community is saying about it. But it is in the best interest of the institution as well as the community to know just what is being said. When well informed about what's being said, the institution can stand ready to respond with accurate information before a full-scale controversy, based on misinformation, erupts.

In the business community, misinformation is treated with absolute sincerity. A national fast-food chain hired private detectives to track down rumor-mongors when tales that the company was beefing up its beef with ground earthworms cut sharply into sales.

Another national firm launched a massive communications campaign after tales spread that its bubble-gum was made soft by including spider eggs in the recipe.

In both of these cases the direct result of misinformation could be clearly seen in the bottom-line. The rumors cost money and jobs so the need for a response -- a tough, active response -- was justified.

Too often, in educational institutions, the effects of ongoing misinformation can not be seen clearly. The dangers of misinformation, therefore, are not as easily recognized. And campaigns to respond to the misinformation usually aren't prompted until it's too late.

But the effects of misinformation on educational institutions can be seen at the ballot box and they can be seen in the swelling enrollments of private schools. They're cumulative effects that can build for years and take years to undo.

One solution is to keep track, through a variety of means, of just what the community is saying and thinking. (See opinion sampling, Chapter 3; See Crisis Communication, Chapter 6.) Too frequently, educators will turn to communication methods they think they can control in a time of misinformation.

Many educational communication programs lean heavily on school produced and controlled publications. The newsletter and brochure stand as the only weapon in the arsenal where school officals may be assured of absolute quality control when disseminating information. Or, at least, that's the myth that often persists.

As information filters into the community it enters a communication mix. The public, filtering information it has received from a variety of sources, will consider it all, disregard some, accept some, and form conclusions--conclusions, by the way, that are extremely difficult to change once reached.

In that communication mix, information that is perceived first hand, in a face-to-face situation, will receive much greater acceptance than that which comes through an intermediary, such as school publications or area mass media.

The mass media, of course, will enjoy greater acceptance because of their independence and third-party interpretation. School publications, after all, are self- serving, and the public will perceive them that way if they're not offered as part of a year-round communication program.

No one expects to see a school newsletter editorial asking people to vote "No" in an upcoming school financial election because the schools really don't need the money.

No one expects to read frank accounts about rampant behavior problems in the secondary schools that have sent 10 students to area hospitals in the past six months. Instead, readers expect steady diets of field trip accounts, lists of names of honor roll students and detailed explanations of why the cost of hot lunches just leaped upward again.

One solution, obviously, is to energize news coverage in school publications—to make them responsive to events. School publications must reflect accurately events happening within the institution that will interest readers in the community. Such a tactic requires a bold commitment on the part of the institution's administration. But it's a commitment that will pay off in a time of crisis. (For more information on publications, see chapter 5. For more information on crisis communication, see chapter 6.)

In review, what emerges is a pattern of communication in educational institutions and their communities that is circular and constantly changing in scope and design. When the public feels wronged it will rightly arm itself with the deadly long-bow of public criticism and start zinging fatal arrows at educational officials.

Too often, the response of those officials is to hide behind their desks while shouting meaningless commands such as, "We need some public relations."

At all times, educational institutions have public relations. When the public starts shouting back, those public relations may not be as good as they should be, but, still, the institution has public relations. And in most cases, a bad state of public relations can be traced directly to inept, unresponsive, or nonexistent communication planning.

When besieged educational officials start shouting "We need some public relations," what they mean is that, "We need better communication."

Recognizing that communication is too complex a process for meaningful dialogs to be conducted solely in the mass media or through publications cranked out of a school print shop, the communication program must then:

1. Recognize the importance of informing internal, as well as external publics.
2. Recognize that communication is a two-way process.
3. Recognize that the communication program must constantly evolve as audiences change and the most effective sources for getting information out change.
4. Recognize that information, inside and outside the institution, will not necessarily be disseminated along the lines normally associated with the accepted organization chart.

5. Recognize the relative importance and place for such standard means of communication as reports to the mass media and school publications.
6. Recognize that everyone who has contact with the institution will function as an ambassador of the institution, no matter how well or ill informed.

APPENDIX

Chapter 2

Appendix A

Question	An Idea	Action Needed	By When
1. Does our communication program work from the inside out...does staff know first?			
2. Do we get feedback from staff regularly... do they know it?			
3. Has our staff ever received any communication training...do they know their PR role?			
4. Does our district have a communication plan...a **written** communication plan?			
5. Do we build a communication component into every new program?			
6. Do we involve citizens in our operation... meaningfully?			
7. Do we understand our community...do we **really** know what people expect of us?			
8. Do people in our community know our priorities...our problems?			
9. Do we listen to the public...regularly... systematically?			
10. Does the behavior of our people show that we really care about educating students?			

CHAPTER 3

Means Can Be Mean When They Mean It

Do you find out about things before they happen... or spend your time as a crisis manager, running from problem to problem?

Today, keeping on top of things means more than holding an annual open house and walking the halls with a half-open ear. Citizens--parents or not--expect to have a say in the way educational programs are run and how tax dollars are spent. Teachers, due in large part to stronger associations, expect to be consulted about major changes in the curriculum, staffing—in fact, just about every major decision you make.

Students, too, want to be heard. It's their future, they reason, and they don't want teachers and administrators to decide "everything" for them.

While the headlines seemingly shout nothing but bad news about education in America today, those closest to our schools often see a different story in action. Students, parents and teachers are unaffected by the simplistic generalizations of the mass media. Everyone knows there are problems, but everyone also knows that schools are routinely recording success stories each day. Many surveys have shown that parents feel education is in serious trouble today, but "the school my child goes to is very good, and his teacher is great." What does your community really think?

To effectively understand how the community looks at its schools, educators must do more than talk to each other. They must avoid becoming "Grocery Gallup's," basing opinions about important school matters on information gathered during a debate at the grocery store over lettuce and leeks.

All of this means only one thing: educators must listen to their many publics. They must know what's going on while it's going on— not afterward.

There are many techniques for accomplishing this, and a combination of several works best. Most are common sense, following the old adage that man has twice as many ears as mouths, and they ought to be used in that proportion.

Feedback comes in all shapes and sizes, from an unexpected call from a concerned parent to a three-member "Citizens for Better Something" to a highly organized task force working to plan major changes in the curriculum.

Surveys also come in many forms, but the easiest (and quickest) in most circumstances is the telephone survey. After training volunteer interviewers and developing a survey instrument, it's not uncommon to have survey results paying dividends in less than a week. Along the way, it's not unusual to pick up a wealth of unexpected public relations bonus points as people (both respondents and volunteers) get involved.

Surveys can identify what's really on the minds of students, staff, parents, or other publics. Action can then be taken from a solid information base. For example, if the survey results indicate that the public perceives the same problems educators do, the data can be used as the foundation for an advisory group. If the public "sees" a problem that doesn't exist, it can be addressed with a few adjustments in the communication program.

Too often, school officials wait until the community is "hot" about an issue affecting schools to decide that it might be useful to find out what people really think. Don't make that mistake--start now, today, to plan a survey feedback program.

The best time to make friends is before you need them. The best time to find out what a community is thinking is before a crisis hits--in time to take actions that may head off the problem or prepare an adequate response.

A careful, regular survey program can identify trends in community attitudes that are vital to the operations of a school district. With attitudes about schools subject to change overnight, it's important to be in touch with what's really going on.

The best reasons for surveys:

- to identify community concerns;

- to provide direction for everything from curriculum to building programs;
- to help avoid crisis by improving communication with different publics; and,
- to involve the members of a community in setting a course of development for the most important natural resource: the children.

Basic Steps To Follow

Doing a survey is fairly simple. Follow these basic steps:

1. Decide what you want to know. Sound easy? It's not. In fact, it's the hardest step in surveying. You have to really think about the information you need to make decisions. Talk about your needs informally with your friends or more formally with committees. If you fail here you'll flunk your survey test completely.

   The best way to start is to simply make a list of what you want to know. Think in categories--groups of logically related concerns or questions that seem to fit together. This will help you later when you select what is most important to accomplish with a single survey.

Organize your ideas and group possible questions. For example, do you want your survey to answer questions about an upcoming election? What are the possible things you might like to know?

a. Is the community aware of the need for a different level of support?

b. Is the perception of the different level of support correct? (Do citizens feel the schools need more money... or less?)

c. If a vote were held today, would the tax request be approved? If so, why? If not, why?

After such a preliminary list has been developed, circulate it to key people involved with the project, including administrators who may be ultimately charged with using the survey results to affect change in the school district and those who may be affected by the changes.

Best of all, consider hosting a brainstorming session with a group of people and toss ideas up for discussion. Develop a consensus about what it is you need to know.

Finally, after your list seems fairly complete, take a long look at it again. Chances are, it will contain a variety of questions that deal with an even wider variety of topics. It must be focused to be useful—you may need to try again.

2. Ask yourself why you want to know this. Why? To make sure that it's really information that will help you run a good school or program. What good will it do to know this? How will it help you? This will also help you organize your thinking and possibly trigger other questions that need to be included.
3. Ask if you can get this information without doing a survey. Do you need some demographic information to help you understand the people you serve? Maybe everything you need is in the latest census estimate, or in figures put together at city hall or by the chamber of commerce. If the information you need already is available, don't waste time with a survey.
4. Decide whom you are going to survey. This involves selecting a population (group) from which you'll draw a sample. Whom you will survey depends on what you want to know. Are you interested in how parents view your programs? Maybe you should survey parents of your students... or maybe you shouldn't. If you pick parents in the current student file you miss the parents of recent graduates--people with valuable opinions since their children have been through the program and know how it works. You also miss citizens without students in your school— citizens

who pay taxes and also have opinions about the value of teaching students. Along with deciding what you want to know, deciding whom to ask is a key step for success.

5. Determine the type of survey method you'll use. There are three basic types of surveys: Written questionnaires (usually mailed), personal interviews and telephone surveys. Each has advantages and disadvantages. All things considered, the telephone survey seems to have the most flexibility for school people. It's easy to do, quick, accurate, inexpensive, and can generate useful information in short time periods. More about this later.
6. Select a sample. The representative group for your survey is known as the sample. A sample consists of a group of individuals chosen in a specific manner to reflect the attitudes of a larger group. There are many types of samples, chosen in different ways according to the information you are trying to uncover in your survey.

Confidence levels can be established with a survey. Simply put, confidence levels indicate how accurately your survey reflects the attitudes of the people sampled.

Generally, surveys with a confidence level of 95 percent are considered excellent. This means that in 100 survey projects conducted under the same circumstances, 95 surveys would show the same results. Contrary to what you might think, a 95 percent confidence level in a survey of 20,000 people can be obtained with a sample size of only 377 people. That´s one reason surveys have proven so valuable. The list of people you will draw your sample from is often called a universe or population. It is simply a collection of the people you would like to interview.

Most school districts like to use registered voter lists or community census lists as the universe for many studies. The logic is simple: registered voters include nearly all adults in most communities. The advent of easy voter registration systems in many states (you can register when you obtain your driver´s license in some states) and voter registration drives that have come with the political activisim of the past decade mean the list is often a good choice for surveying. From this registered voter list comes the names of those most likely to vote in school elections.

Many surveys are conducted to find out opinions about tax matters and other financial problems that may affect taxes. That makes use of the list even more sensible.

In districts with access to computers, registered voter lists have been even more narrowly defined. Some districts have maintained records of active voters, broken down by those who have voted in school elections and/or other city and county ballots. While this provides a universe of more active voters, it ignores the fact that a particularly controversial issue will draw voters who may never have voted on school issues before. It should be carefully examined before its selection as the universe.

A census list, on the other hand, has the advantage of being essentially a house-to-house canvass of all citizens in the community. When updated annually, it is a complete list of every home in the community, parent and non-parent alike. Problems with the census list come with incomplete data (phone numbers are often not available) and with age of the list (not every district completes a census each year and mobility puts the list quickly out of date). Other samples could be drawn from telephone books, but the books often underrepresent some segments of the community, including minorities and those with privately listed numbers (on the rise everywhere). It is possible to randomly generate telephone numbers, which by chance include private numbers, but school districts generally are not sophisticated enough to handle the complexities of doing so, and those interviewed sometimes have hostile reactions to having their privacy disrupted.

7. Develop a timeline for your survey project. Start with the date you'll conduct the survey and work backward from that point. List all the activities that have to take place so everything will go smoothly on the day you begin interviewing. Be sure you indicate who has responsibility for what by when. This is an obvious attempt to help you plan... to keep you on track.

Beyond the Basics

Those are the basics. But there's more:

- Make a list of necessary resources (people and materials). Involve a variety of people in all phases of your survey, from planning right on through the actual calling and evaluation of your data.

- Secure financial support for the survey. This means sufficient funds to pay for some inservice training of telephone volunteers and help with question wording (more art than science, and something an experienced survey specialist can help with).
- Choose the people to be interviewed. Remember to explore several alternatives. Can the people you'll survey provide the information you want? A survey specialist can help you decide.
- Outline the survey content and frame the questions. Don't try to do too much, at least in your first survey. Stick to one general goal and keep the interviews short-- five to 10 minutes at most.
- Refine the questions and design an easy-to-use format. Don't assume your questions will work, or even that people will understand them. Test them on people like those who will ultimately be sampled. Ask this "pretest" group if they have difficulty understanding any of the questions... or if they have any suggestions for improving wording. Change words that are not familiar. Example: depending on how old you are and where you live, the large piece of furniture in your living room used for sitting (sleeping, too) can be a sofa, couch, or divan. The pretest is one of the most important steps in surveying. It assures

that the people you will be sampling will understand what you are asking. It's the step during which the "public" actually determines the content of the final survey instrument.

- Teach interviewers how to gather information. Anticipate questions and responses you may get from those you'll be surveying. Train your interviewers to handle them. Practice with the survey questions. Show interviewers the fine points--the difference between merely recording responses and encouraging complete and candid discussions. A consultant can be a great help here.
- Establish controls to make sure the interviewing gets done. Bring all your interviewers together in one location on the same day and complete the survey "on the spot." You can monitor the calls to make sure the interviewers are not injecting--however unknowingly--personal bias into the responses. In addition to providing controls, working in a single location allows for on-the-spot adjustments and helps mold your volunteer interviewers into a cohesive group more likely to help the next time.
- Conduct the surveys and prepare the responses for tabulation. After you've completed the actual interviewing it's time to find out what you've found

out. If you have access to a computer, you'll likely be using the computer to scan pencil-marked sheets and to provide results. (Many universities and businesses offer this service at minimal cost.) If you'll be tabulating responses by hand, make sure you've arranged for enough help. Your survey reflects the attitudes of a given group of people at the time the survey was taken. What's true today won't necessarily be true in three months... or even tomorrow. Without adequate help, your secretary just might need three months to completely tabulate the surveys.

- Analyze the results. Here again, a consultant can provide assistance. Did you complete enough interviews? What do the results tell you? What do the results suggest should be included in the next survey? What should we do now?
- Finally, report the new knowledge. Don't keep the results to yourself. Interpret them for people. Those involved in creating the survey naturally will be curious, and so will the people who were actually surveyed. Released correctly, survey results can pay big public relations dividends. You can confirm that you're doing a good job... or suggest that you're

keeping up with the expressed will of the people by listening to their concerns and responding to their needs.

The First Step Is The Hardest

As with amost everying else, the first step—deciding to do a survey—is the hardest. And there are all kinds of reasons for putting off this kind of project. ("I don't know where to start." "Numbers scare me." "It'll take too much time." And worst of all: "I might find out that we have some problems.")

Get started by taking these steps:

1. Think about some potential survey topics.
2. Discuss them with colleagues.
3. Get an informal group together to list some questions that might be asked.
4. Ask the journalism staff to help reword them.
5. Ask the math department to help you select a sample that's representative.
6. Cover the logistics.

We guarantee it. You will learn new things about the public you survey—things that will help you be a better manager. You'll discover new ways to improve communication. You'll build better understanding of your school. And you'll enjoy your job more than ever... because with understanding comes the support you deserve.

APPENDICES

Chapter 3

Appendix A

SAMPLE SIZE TABLE

Universe	95	90
10	10	10
15	14	14
20	19	19
25	24	23
30	28	27
35	32	31
40	36	35
45	40	39
50	44	43
55	48	46
60	52	49
65	56	53
70	59	56
75	63	59
80	66	62
85	70	65
90	73	68
95	86	71
100	80	73
110	86	78
120	92	83
130	97	88
140	103	92
150	108	97
160	113	101
170	118	105
180	123	108
190	127	112
200	132	115
210	130	118
220	140	122
230	144	125
240	148	127
250	152	130
260	155	133
270	159	135
280	162	138
290	165	140
300	169	143
320	175	147
340	181	151
360	186	155
380	191	158
400	196	162
420	201	165
440	205	168
460	210	171
480	214	173
500	217	176
559	226	182
600	234	187
650	242	191
700	248	195
750	254	199
800	260	202
900	269	208
1000	278	213
1100	285	217
1200	291	221
1300	297	224
1400	302	227
1500	303	229
1600	310	238
2000	322	238
3000	341	248
4000	351	254
5000	357	257
10000	370	263
20000	377	267
30000	379	268
50000	381	269
100000	384	271

Chapter 3

Appendix B

HOW TO DRAW A SAMPLE

Assume for this example that we wish to attain a confidence level of 95 percent. Our community has a universe of 20,000 registered voters.

1. Establish confidence level	1. 95 percent
2. Determine sample size necessary	2. Using a table to determine sample size, we find it necessary to interview 377 individuals to attain confidence objectives.
3. Divide the universe by the sample size to obtain skip interval	3. 20,000 divided by 377=53. The skip interval is 53.
4. Select a random number larger than one but smaller than the skip interval	4. Use a table of random numbers. Let's assume for this example that the random number is 10.
5. Count to the random number	5. Count to the 10th name in the registered voter list. The 10th individual will be the first person in the sample.
6. Use the skip interval to select individuals until the sample size is obtained	6. Count 53 names down the list from name number 10. That individual is the second person in the sample. Then count 53 more names to reach the third person in the sample... and so on until you have 377 names. You now have a sample which will provide 95 confidence for our universe of 20,000 registered voters.

Chapter 3

Appendix C

SAMPLE SURVEY

Hello, (Mrs. Jones____, I'm (interviewer's name), a volunteer calling for the ____________ Public Schools.

We're conducting a telephone survey to find out what people think about their schools.

We'll be calling almost 400 randomly selected school district residents during the survey, and would like just a few minutes of your time for some important questions.

Incidentally, your answers will remain confidential--all responses will be averaged to obtain a general picture of community opinion.

---

1. First, how many children do you have attending the __________ Public Schools?

    (1) None (SKIP to Question 3)
    (2) 1
    (3) 2
    (4) 3-4
    (5) 5-6
    (6) 7-8
    (7) 9 or more

2. What grades are they in?

    (1) Elementary
    (2) Junior High (7-9)
    (3) Senior High (10-12)

3. Do you feel you are able to keep well informed, somewhat well informed, or not too well informed about what is going on in the ________________ Public Schools?

    (1) well informed
    (2) somewhat informed
    (3) not too well informed
    (4) can't say/no response

SAMPLE SURVEY (Continued)

4. Where do you get most of your information about the __________ Public Schools? (DO NOT READ LIST)

(1) students
(2) other parents/adults
(3) school employees
(4) newspaper
(5) radio/TV
(6) notes, memos, other school publications
(7) PTA/parent groups
(8) other____________________________
(9) can't say/no response

5. Would you like to know more about the ______________ Public Schools?

(1) yes
(2) no (SKIP to Question 7)

6. What kinds of information would be of particular interest to you? (DO NOT READ LIST)

(1) the curriculum
(2) child's progress
(3) teachers/teaching methods
(4) school rules/policies
(5) financial information
(6) extra curricular activities
(7) special services available
(8) everything
(9) other_______________________________
(0) can't say/no response

. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, E to show how well they're doing in school. Suppose your school district were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the ____________________ Public Schools - A, B, C, D, or E.

(1) A
(2) B
(3) C
(4) D
(5) E
(6) can't say/no response

8. The Board of Education would like to improve your schools. Suppose for a moment that you were on the Board of Education--what do you think could be done to improve our schools next year?

____

____

SAMPLE SURVEY (Continued)

9. Next, I'm going read you a list of programs and services offered by your schools. As I read each item, tell me if you think it is very important, somewhat important or not very important.

	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT VERY	CAN'T SAY/ NO RESPONSE
services for handicapped	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
vocational education	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
music at the elementary level	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
counseling services	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
remedial reading	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
programs for the academically talented	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
after school programs at the high school	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

10. What do you like least about the ____________Public Schools?

11. What do you like best about the ___________ Public Schools?

12. And finally, can you tell me the name of the elementary school nearest your home?

(1) ___________
(2) ___________
(3) ___________
(4) ___________

THAT CONCLUDES OUR SURVEY. THANKS FOR HELPING.

(continued)

SAMPLE SURVEY (Continued)

FOR INTERVIEWER ONLY:

13. Was the respondent

    (1) male
    (2) female

14. Your Name________________________________

Chapter 4

Working With The Media

And that´s the way it is

Educators who have been thoroughly lanced by the barbs of editorial criticism know the painful truth in the adage, "The pen is mightier than the sword."

In fact, it is often the old sayings about the power of news organizations that guide the philosophy of communication programs when it comes to dealing with the media.

"You can´t argue with people who buy ink by the barrel," is another axiom that´s turned to in times of editorial attack. But like many of the old sayings, it´s simply a wry generality that should not make up the total attitude towards the media.

For the most part, news organizations and their reporters operate in a profession that prides itself on accuracy and fairness. The first step for a communication program is to break down the aura of power and mystery often associated with news organizations.

Reporters are simply people with a job to do. And they´ll appreciate your help, understanding and cooperation in doing that job.

The two broad categories where educational officials will come in contact with the media include: 1) Responding to media-generated inquiries regarding developing stories; and,

2) Requesting coverage from the media on education-related events and information. In both cases, there are some firm do's and don'ts for educators to follow ...and there are some severe penalties for those who break the rules.

A communication program should clearly outline responsibilities when the time arrives for someone to comment to the media. Institutions should avoid the problem of "who should we bounce this call to?" when the media start asking questions.

The speed and ease with which media inquiries are handled can have a great impact on the final coverage the institution receives. A series of unanswered calls, transferred calls and "no comments," may lead a reporter to suspect that the story is "bigger" than he originally thought since everyone seems to be going out of his way to be uninformed or unavailable.

The best solution, though one that often can create anxiety among the higher administrative ranks, is to include a statement in the communication policy which allows everyone within the institution to speak to the media about inquiries related to his responsibility area.

There is no reason, for example, that a food service director should have to check with the building principal before answering a reporter's question of what makes up a nutritional lunch. The question is obviously within the director's area of responsibility, and the director most likely knows more about well-balanced meals than the principal does anyway. The principal should be informed that such an inquiry has been received, but his direct involvement should be limited to meeting the reporter if he visits the building and offering any additional assistance the reporter might need.

Policies developed with the nervous twitch that employees aren't capable of speaking for themselves can have some disastrous results.

A superintendent in one school district, for example, insisted that all media inquiries be forwarded to his office and that no one else was to talk to the media. That policy worked fine until he went on vacation.

A reporter from a local newspaper had heard about an exciting new reading program in an elementary school and set out to do a nice feature story on children learning to read.

The reporter's first call, logically, went to the classroom teacher involved. The teacher sent the reporter to the building principal, who sent him to the Director of Elementary Education, who sent him to the Deputy Superintendent, who sent him to the Superintendent, who was basking in the Florida sun and was unavailable for comment.

For two days the reporter tried in vain to get somebody to say something about this great new reading program. On deadline, frustrated, and with space to fill, the reporter wrote his story. It appeared on the front page and was headlined, "$90,000 a Year And I Can't Tell You."

What started out as a feature on a successful reading program turned into an account of how four people, together earning more than $90,000 a year, couldn't say a word about what they did to earn it. An excellent opportunity to show the community one way in which their tax dollars were working hard turned into an embarrassing black eye for the school district.

Of course, simply adopting a policy that allows employees to comment to the media within areas of their own responsibility, is a first step that must be followed by some appropriate guidance on how to work with the media. There is a curious etiquette surrounding dealings with reporters that anyone who might come in contact with reporters should fully understand.

Two common reactions among people asked questions by reporters are either the self-serving, "Oh, Boy- Here's my chance to be a star," or the blood-pumping, "Oh, No ... I'm going to say something I shouldn't and lose my job." Both reactions can have embarrassing consequences.

When it comes to dealing with the media, all employees, from the superintendent to the switchboard operator, should keep the following points in mind:

1) Reporters always work with a deadline on their backs. Often they can't wait until someone returns from vacation or even out of a meeting for the information they want. Calls from the media should be placed on top of the pile of calls to be returned if no one is immediately available.

2) Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know," to a reporter asking for information you don't have, but do suggest someone who can help or offer to dig out the information for the reporter as soon as possible. Reporters don't expect everyone to know everything all of the time. But they do appreciate cooperation.

3) Don't let emotions get in the way of credible and sensible responses. Some people get so excited when talking to reporters that they ramble on with quotes they'll wish they'd kept to themselves after the story finally appears. Others, overly anxious at the questioning, may unknowingly try to be as evasive as possible, leading reporters to cast unwarranted suspicions on their motives. Keep calm and treat the conversations with reporters as you would with any other visitor.

4) Never assume that anything is "off-the-record." Speaking off-the-record is a tricky business to get into and an excellent business, in most cases, to stay out of. Although the large majority of reporters are trustworthy in off-the-record matters, some can't resist the temptation of publishing, say, an off-the-record comment that a certain staff member is a buffoon, especially if the person being questioned just spent 20 minutes telling the reporter that the staff member is an absolute genius.

If you're about to take a risk and go off-the-record, clearly state that intention ahead of time and get the reporter's consent that everything you say from that point on is not for publication. But don't expect that to be the end of it. Information you give a reporter off-the-record may lead him to seek out the same information from another source and it may find its way into print regardless.

For the most part, off-the-record dealings are better left for the very few times when information may be of use to a reporter developing a story though not essential for the telling of the story at that particular time.

Off-the-record comments can place reporters in uncomfortable professional positions when it is, after all, their job to seek out the full and true story.

5) Recognize up front that reporters are not out to get you. They're out to get a story. They're out to get facts.

Reporters are just as busy, just as frustrated, and just as human as you are.

6) Speak in plain English to reporters. They will not be impressed with your extensive collection of educational jargon and in some cases may even resent it.

The origin of jargon has been traced to criminals who were interested in developing a kind of nonsense language they could use in public places to discuss their crimes while eaves dropping, law-abiding citizens would be none the wiser. Jargon still carries that image today. And jargon can cause genuine comments to be misjudged as evasive or misleading.

In one case, at a news conference following a fire that destroyed a school building, a school official was asked what would now happen to students who had lost classrooms in the blaze. He responded by stating, "I would project that the school district will support the concept of providing adequate facilities for those pupils left without adequate space due to the recent fire."

Translation- - "I'm not certain right now but we will provide space somewhere so these children can continue their schooling."

In the newspaper, as well as on television or radio, you will be allowed only a few seconds to get your message across. It is in your best interest, then, to speak as clearly and concisely as possible.

7) Never ask a reporter to see a copy of his article before it's published. A classroom teacher wouldn't ask a reporter to look over his lesson plans before teaching a class. An administrator would never ask a reporter to review an employee evaluation before discussing it with the employee. It's the reporter's task alone to write an article that is fair and accurate.

8) Never ask a reporter for a copy of his story after it's published. Such a request is akin to saying, "I never read your scandal sheet so would you clip a copy of the story so I can paste it in my scrap book?" To keep from embarrassing yourself, spend a quarter, buy the paper, and clip it yourself.

9) Avoid charging out to a reporter's editor with complaints that you've been misquoted if you don't agree with what you finally read. Recognize first of all that interviews allow for only tid-bits of the sum of what you said. What you considered most important and what the reporter considered most important are often two very different things. And in this one-sided game, it's solely up to the reporter to decide

those things. During an interview, you might want to highlight key points that you believe are important for the reporter to understand.

Many times, reporters, when they have the time, will appreciate frank discussions of just why you thought an article was unfair or misleading. But those discussions may only lead to more responsive reporting on future encounters. Don't expect a front page retraction-- or any kind of retraction--unless you can prove beyond any doubt that the reporter has erred.

10) Allow adequate time for the reporter to do his job. When dealing with the electronic media, you'll have to allow time for the set up and tear down of equipment. But even with the print media the reporter may need more than just a few moments to get the story he's after. It's to your advantage to see to it that enough time is spent in tracking the story. There's nothing wrong with asking up front just how much time a reporter thinks he may need with you before setting a time for an interview. Just as reporters are extremely busy with deadlines to meet, they recognize that you are, too. They'll respect your time.

Although it's wise to train everyone within the institution to work with the media in areas where they have responsibility, some person should be appointed as a spokesperson or primary contact for the media to aid in the process.

The spokesperson or contact should have responsibility for coordinating the overall media relations services within the communication program as well as functioning as a time-saver for reporters who don't know where to begin.

It's a tough job to define and execute. One of the first obstacles that will have to be overcome is the misinterpretation that may exist among some reporters that the position is simply that of a public relations "flack" designed to protect officials by running interference for them.

To be successful, the job as spokesperson should not be added to the list of an official who already has too many duties to complete in a normal work day.

The person assuming the position must also be willing to work odd hours, attend as many school meetings and functions as possible, and accept public criticism with grace whenever controversy erupts.

The media contact will have to accept the fact that news organizations work unique hours to have broadcasts ready for 11 p.m. and newspapers on your doorstep to accompany the morning coffee. It's not uncommon, therefore, to expect media calls late in the evening. Reporters should be encouraged to call the spokesperson at home for any information they might need in developing a story.

Because the media contact will have to be fully briefed at all times on events affecting the institution, it's essential that the person work closely with the institution's decision- and policy-makers. If not seen by the media as functioning with the institution's decision-makers, the media contact will be by-passed in favor of other sources, leaving the position practically useless.

Also, since the spokesperson will most often be on the front line, through the very nature of the job, he can expect to be the first hit with volleys of criticism. He should be ready to accept the criticism whether he personally deserves it or not.

When it comes to suggesting coverage possibilities to the media, there is no single formula that can be relied on for success. Although it may occasionally help to have a friend who publishes, edits or writes for a newspaper, the notion that taking an old buddy from the newspaper out to lunch is one sure way to guarantee some good coverage is, largely, a myth.

Reporters and editors appreciate solid story ideas. The problem is that most editors and reporters get literally hundreds of them each day. There's a great deal of competition for what little space and air time reporters can use.

The simple facts are that, whether you're dealing with large metropolitan daily newspapers or small weeklies, there's some heavy competition for coverage. Your material should be prepared with that in mind.

Any information released to media should:

— Come from a single source. By funneling all information to the media through a single source, the media are offered a single contact who can quickly follow up with additional information and the institution is assured that the information going out has been prepared to meet the highest professional standards. If the information is good and well presented, editors will grow to appreciate the information and have the confidence to assign someone to follow up knowing that their time won't be wasted.

— Carefully evaluted for newsworthiness. Sending out non-news items treated like news just to satisfy someone's ego may help ease your personal relationships with fellow staff members, but it will erode your credibility as a source for solid news stories among editors.

— Be timely. Editors often need as much advance notice as possible to arrange for coverage. If reporters normally don't cover board meetings but you supply them with accounts, send the accounts out the next day, not the next week. And offer reporters options. If a science fair will be open all week, there's no need to insist that reporters come the first day. Provide them a full schedule of when the exhibits will be open as well as times when they may talk to students and teachers involved. Then the reporters can fit the event into their schedules.

In some instances, a quick telephone call to editors may be all that's needed for coverage. Most of the time, however, you will have to rely on news releases to get your information out. And poorly written and prepared news releases can find their way from an editor's desk to his trash can with lightning speed.

Newswriting is a talent like no other form of writing. One all too frequent mistake made by educational institutions is that anyone educated must know how to write, everyone in the institution is educated, therefore, everyone's a news writer.

Anyone responsible for the preparation of news releases from the institution must have at least some training in preparing news copy. If not, you'll find yourself wasting a lot of paper and postage.

News releases should follow these guidelines:

1) The releases should follow a single format, with consistent headings, and the contact person's name, office and home phone numbers for media follow-up.

2) The releases should be neatly typed, on white paper, double-spaced, with no grammatical errors or misspellings.

3) The release should show the date it was issued as well as the date or dates it may be used by the media.

4) Releases should be developed specifically for the medium they're sent to. Releases for radio stations may differ from

those for television stations and releases for print media will differ from both.

5) In a note to editors, the release should offer any ancillary information that may assist an editor in deciding whether or not to follow up on the story (interview possibilities, photo possibilities, tie-ins with related local or national stories, visual opportunities for television stations, audio opportunities for radio stations and so on).

(See news release samples)

The information in each news release will have to be presented quickly and completely in acceptable news writing style.

Although editors will not always expect superb examples of journalistic writing talent in your releases, they will expect writing that shows you understand how news copy should be prepared.

The lead, or first paragraph of your release, will often signal to the editor whether the story deserves a follow-up. Just as readers skim through a newspaper reading bits and pieces of some stories, editors skim through news releases picking up bits and pieces, disregarding some stories right off, carefully studying others in more detail for possible use.

The lead of the news release should spark reader interest while answering the five W's of a news story: Who the event is about; What the event is about; Where the event happened or will happen; When the event happened or will happen, and Why the event happened or will happen.

The information in the news release should flow in a descending order of importance to the story.

News release copy should be packed with action verbs and live quotes that make the story come to life.

It is also important to keep a running tab of:

— Deadlines. Reporters and editors will not appreciate receiving phone calls from you when they're on deadline. In fact, if you do manage to get through, you'll just get a terse, "Call me later!" Knowing deadlines will also help you determine when you should release information. With weekly papers for example, missing a deadline means delaying your information for at least another week. Also keep comparisons of deadlines in mind when releasing information if you're dealing with more than one news organization. Information continually released early in the morning will make it appear as if you're consistently favoring an afternoon paper. Information consistently released in the late afternoon will make it look as if you're favoring a morning paper.

— Names. Keep updating your media contact list to make sure your information is going to the right person. While new assignments are occasionally announced in newspapers, often they are not. If a reporter once assigned to education is moved to religion, he will have little use for your releases, Even if he does take the time to forward them on they may be delayed or lost in the shuffle.

— News trends. If stories on test scores are appearing because of national or regional discussions on the topics, then the time may be ripe to suggest a possible story on a testing program that has been operating in your schools. Be certain, of course, that information you can supply will provide a new or interesting viewpoint on the subject and not just another rehash of what has already appeared.

-- Coverage. A running collection of news items that have appeared about the institution should be maintained for evaluation purposes. On a periodic basis, the stories should be reviewed to assess the total build-up of media-supplied information that has been entering the community's communication mix.

Suggesting possible stories to the media can be a real challenge at times because of the familiarity people develop after working at their projects on a day-to-day basis. People sometimes fail to recognize the exciting and unique qualities of their work.

A communication director at a large university was once making the rounds of departments searching for story possibilities when he met the director of the science department in the hallway. When asked what was new in the science department, the science director thought for a moment and then replied, "Nothing I can think of."

Just before continuing on, the communication director looked out a window and saw some men working in an adjoining field. "What's going on down there?" he asked. "Oh that," the science director responded. "We're going to start construction on a new laboratory next week and they're getting ready for the ground breaking ceremony."

For the science director, the new lab was an old story. She had been involved with the project for months, from the time it was originally proposed and studied, through the planning and funding stages, and now, finally, into the construction stage.

For the communication director, the new lab was a coverage opportunity very nearly missed.

The search for possible story ideas should be ongoing and should be open to everyone within the institution. (See accompanying charts for story ideas and reporting techniques.)

To review, the media relations component of a communication program begins with some mutual understanding. As media covering the institution strive to understand it and its workings, those within the institution must strive to understand the media and their way of doing business.

The media will be critical when they feel their criticism can be justified. But unwarranted criticism can be avoided when some basic planning for dealing with media inquiries are established.

Although everyone within an institution shares a responsibility for working with the media, an institution's communication program must allow for the coordination of overall media relations activities.

Along with servicing media requests promptly, information supplied should be carefully and professionally prepared.

APPENDICES

Chapter 4

Appendix A

NOTE: The material in this Appendix is copyright 1979 by Cass Franks and William J. Banach, 55555 Jewell, Washington, MI 48094 and may not be reproduced. The material is adapted from a booklet titled, "Getting Out the Good News" which is available from Franks.

THE SIX-STEP PROCESS TO GETTING OUT YOUR GOOD NEWS

STEP 1. Decide who cares about your good news.

STEP 2. Decide what they might like to know.

STEP 3. Decide who should get which news.

STEP 4. Decide the best way to spread your good news.

STEP 5. Make sure the "why" and "how" are included with the "who," "what," "when" and "where" of your news.

STEP 6. Seek feedback on whether your new communication efforts are working.

WHAT IS SCHOOL NEWS?

School news is anything that's timely and significant to some audience. Examples include pilot programs, class projects, field trips and school policies. You'll find a number of other newsworthy events listed on pages

WHAT'S NEWS ABOUT ME?

As a school employee, you frequently do things that are timely and significant to audiences such as students, parents and others around you. How you do this makes you and your program newsworthy.

Whether it's a new idea or a "twist" to an old idea, something special that's going on, your students' achievement, service beyond the call of duty, an experience that helps students learn better or something else, you are news.

WHO CARES ABOUT MY NEWS?

STEP 1

There are four major audiences or "publics" for school news. They are individual parents, all parents as a group, the public-at-large and other staff members. Each of these audiences is interested in different news events.

For example, individual parents are eager to know most every incident that happens to their child in the classroom.

Parents as a group are interested in the general programs of study, teaching methods and any special techniques or systems you use.

The public-at-large is interested in learning about anything that changes the average classroom's progress or is noteable in another way.

And staff members should know about any special programs or teaching techniques you use so they can benefit and explain them to other people they meet in the course of their professional and social lives.

WHAT DO PEOPLE LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT?

STEP 2

There are a number of newsworthy topics and events listed on the following pages. They are things likely to occur in a typical school. Step 2 calls for you to identify the newsworthy events in your school. Check the list... and feel free to add some of your own.

WHO SHOULD GET WHICH NEWS?

STEP 3

Step 3 is designed to help you identify who should get which news. (Remember, not all people are interested in all news.) Make check marks in the columns to identify the major audiences for each topic or event.

	INDIVIDUAL PARENT	ALL PARENTS	PUBLIC-AT-LARGE	STAFF
CURRICULUM NEWS				
Pilot programs and course improvements - why instituted and how they're doing.				
Special courses such as health, physical education or graphics.				
Explanations of everyday programs like citizenship, health, arts, language, social studies, co-op, etc.				
Unique enrichment recreation, intramural or community education programs at the school for students and adults.				
Inservice meeting explanation. What's being planned to help kids?				
Departmental information. Goals of each department. Example: What speech, visiting teachers and psychologists do.				

	INDIVIDUAL PARENT	ALL PARENTS	PUBLIC-AT-LARGE	STAFF
STUDENT ACTIVITIES				
National Merit semi-finalists and commended students.				
Winners in district, area, regional, state or national contests of all sorts (art, yearbooks, debate, writing, athletics, industrial arts, band, beauty, etc.)				
Student Council discussions and decisions affecting parents.				
Naming of persons to student group offices, yearbook staff, etc.				
Special field trips, investigations or activities to benefit programs of study.				
Follow-up news on graduates (the pro football players, the co-ed who became a doctor, etc.)				
SCHOOL INFORMATION				
Policies such as attendance (annually).				
Annual improvements to school.				
Michigan Week, National Education Week, etc., plans.				
Special assemblies, sales, talent shows, open houses, plays, etc.				
School historical notes such as famous teams, events.				
Accreditation information (on occasion).				

	INDIVIDUAL PARENT	ALL PARENTS	PUBLIC-AT-LARGE	STAFF
SCHOOL INFORMATION (continued)				
Finance information (as needed).				
Counseling programs, college nights, career information, scholarship news, financial aid, etc.				
Lunch information and monthly menus.				
Requests for help. Examples: crossing guards, hall monitors, custodians, etc.				
Enrollment information (an annual story). Number of students (total and by grade), enrollment trends, etc.				
How to contact a teacher or principal for a conference.				
Graduation information (top grads, commencement plans, etc.).				
Homework, medical testing, student records, financial aid, report cards, library information.				
MISCELLANEOUS				
Clothing, food and other charity drives.				
Busing information and rules (an annual story).				

MISCELLANEOUS (continued)	INDIVIDUAL PARENT	ALL PARENTS	PUBLIC-AT-LARGE	STAFF
"Did You Know?" and "Would You Believe?" These are fillers. They can include statistics on the school, information on the faculty, the number of lunches served every month, etc.				
Lost and found.				
Request or appreciation for student, staff and parent volunteers.				
New laws affecting schools. Examples: student records, school books.				
Tips to parents who want to help their students.				

SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS

STEP 4

This can be a little tricky because the communication techniques change with the audience you're trying to reach. Here are a few communication techniques for getting out your good news to your school's four major audiences. (A staff brainstorming session can add more of them to this list.)

INDIVIDUAL PARENTS - Parent-teacher conferences, report cards, home phone calls, personal notes, home visits, "grams" and logs completed by children daily or weekly.

ALL PARENTS - Open houses, curriculum nights, classroom and school newsletters.

PUBLIC-AT-LARGE - Contact newspapers and other media by phone, note or letter. Use the tip sheet outlined in this booklet to organize your information.

STAFF MEMBERS - Use notes on bulletin boards, informal discussions and direct presentations to inform fellow staffers of your special efforts or programs.

One of the best ways to communicate with the public-at-large is through media such as newspapers and television. And one of the best ways to inform the media of your newsworthy event is by using the news tip sheet on page 104.

ADD THE "WHY" AND "HOW" TO YOUR NEWS

STEP 5

Including the "why" and "how" of classroom news helps others to understand and appreciate its educational value. Explaining "why" helps people realize that events such as field trips or balloon messages have important educational concepts behind them. The public doesn't always know the value of new school programs. So you've got to make sure the "why" of such programs is a part of every public mention or description of them.

SEEK FEEDBACK

STEP 6

One of the hardest questions to ask of another person is: "How am I doing?" Yet it's a must to find out whether your good news discussions, messages or presentations are working. Finish your phone calls, parent conferences or newsletters by asking people if they are satisfied with your information. If not, use their suggestions to improve.

You can figure your media efforts are working if your topic or event is publicized. If not, contact the reporter or editor to find out where you went wrong... and try again. It's also a good idea to check or clip good educational articles to get a feeling for the kinds of information used by the media.

Chapter 4

Appendix B

Macomb Intermediate School District
What's UP?
286·8800

NEWS TIP SHEET

Name of School/Department

Date

Who

What

When

Where

Why

How

Picture Possibilities

Contact person/s for more information

Phone

Comments

MISD
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield
Mount Clemens, Michigan 48044

Chapter 4

Appendix C

Macomb Intermediate School District
What's UP?
286·8800

NEWS RELEASE

TODAY'S DATE: (Insert today's date)

FOR RELEASE: (Immediate or appropriate date)

FOR MORE INFORMATION: (Contact person and phone number)

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES PLANNED

All classes in the (school district) will be suspended for one-half day (days and dates).

The closing of school will permit parent-teacher conferences in all elementary and junior high schools, as well as "in-service" training programs for all other instructional personnel.

The elementary school parent-teacher conferences will feature (here mention any outstanding plans for the conference and in-service meetings).

(Here explain school closing plans, such as:) Elementary school classes that begin at 8:30 a.m. Thursday will be dismissed at 11:05 a.m. Elementary classes that begin at 9:05 a.m. Thursday will be dismissed at 11:40 a.m.

Students from the school district's senior highs will be dismissed at 10:15 a.m. Thursday. Students from the junior high schools will be dismissed at 10:55 a.m.

The junior high school parent-teacher conferences will be held district wide. Teachers are contacting parents on a need basis. Parents who have not been notified that a conference has been scheduled for their child........

MISD
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield
Mount Clemens, Michigan 48044

Chapter 5

Publications

Freezing in a Paper Blizzard

Just as with employees and students, educational publications function like ambassadors in the outside world, representing the educational institution.

The way publications look, what they offer, and how well they're written and prepared will quietly say a great deal about the institution for which they've been published.

While it may not always be in an institution's best interest to produce publications that have a slick look and feel of products from a Madison Avenue advertising agency, certain rules that guide the production of publications should not be ignored.

The past decade has seen printing costs sky rocket. Yet, increased costs alone are not reason enough to abandon publications as one method of getting information out in a communication program. However, increased costs do mandate the need for greater care in producing publications to assure the maximum benefits are gained for the time and financial commitments extended.

Publication planning is an essential first step too often overlooked in the publication process. Newsletters too frequently appear every few months because someone has decided simply that a newsletter is needed. Brochures crop up on tables in reception areas because somebody thought brochures would be a nice item to have on hand for waiting visitors.

Since publications are the single item in the communication mix where an institution can, to a large degree, control the message and focus for an audience, they are far too vital to write off as exercises undertaken to show a willingness to communicate.

In the planning process, some tough questions must be considered. First, a precise audience for the publication needs to be defined. Secondly, it must be determined if a publication is the best way to convey the messages to the targeted audience. And, finally, periodic evaluations must be conducted to see if the audience remains and if the publication performs as well as it should to justify its continuation.

By far, the most common form of educational publication is the community newsletter. Usually a potpourri of stories and photographs, the community newsletter is a shotgun approach intended to fill in whatever communication void may exist between the school and the community. In some communities, they work; in others, they don't.

The proper planning, design and production of a publication is underscored when considering the communication competition a typical school newsletter gets in the average American home.

The competition starts in the mailbox, where an assortment of letters, bills, advertisements and magazines are already fighting for the reader's eye. Once inside the home, television, radio, and other family members are competing for communication time.

To score in this competition for communication time, educational publications must be armed with the attention-getting weapons needed to snare an adequate share of the audience.

Publications are made up of five components: Copy, or the written word; Headlines; Art; Photographs; and White or blank space. How these five components work together in the overall design will determine how well the publication is read.

COPY PREPARATION

There are two key elements to preparing publication copy. First, there is the copy itself and how it is written. Second, there is the physical appearance of the typeset copy and how easy it is for the human eye to decipher and read.

Each article or section should begin with an attention-getting lead paragraph enticing the reader to read on while answering the five basic questions, who, what, when, where and why.

Sentences and paragraphs should be short. Active verbs should be used instead of passive verbs. And quotes should be used liberally to add a human touch to the message.

When the copy is set, a typestyle and size should be chosen that will fit into what average readers are used to seeing and dealing with. Type sizes are measured in points, with the smallest usually measuring six points (commonly found in newspaper classified sections), and the largest usually being 72 points (the inch-high characters common in screaming newspaper headlines).

For publication copy, an 11 to 14 point style should be chosen, allowing for the maximum ease of readability. Readers will stick with a publication as long as reading it creates only a minimum of inconvenience.

A serif type style, one with small hooks at ends of each letter, should be used. The hooks allow the reader's eye to readily fix on the small characters and make reading easier. (See accompanying charts for type size and style comparisons.)

HEADLINES

Along with announcing what a reader can expect in a story, headlines also guide readers to what's important, what should be read first and what can wait until later. In general, of course, the larger the headline, the more importance the article it accompanies takes on.

While readers expect and appreciate this headline guidance in their publications, they get angry when fooled and will not appreciate headlines that purposely attempt to misguide their reading patterns.

For skimmers, headlines may be the only portion of the publication that gets read. It´s best, then, to make sure that headlines themselves tell as much of the story as possible so "quick readers" get at least some benefit from the publication.

If say-nothing headlines like: TWO GET AWARDS, PRINCIPAL NAMED, or HONOR ROLL STUDENTS are used, one large audience segment, the skimmers, are completely missed and the publication´s effectiveness will slip.

All headlines should contain a verb. Abbreviations should be avoided. The headlines should be as accurate as possible. And, like the lead of the story, they should be written to entice the reader into reading while not being too sensational to be misleading.

When choosing headline type, the size will vary from 18 points to 36 points and the style should be a sanserif (letters lack the small hooks found on serif type. Because of the larger size of the characters, the reader´s eyes don´t need the hooks to fix on.)

ART AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Publications that offer the readers no devices to break the copy look as exciting to read as an insurance policy.

Art and photographs lure skimmers to pick up additional information that might have been missed.

Art must be clean and simple with an obvious relationship to the copy it accompanies. Photographs should be clear and sharp with an obvious attention center providing a focus for the reader's eye.

WHITE SPACE

Instead of considering white space, or blank space, as a design element, some publication planners unfortunately view it as wasted space. Worried that tax-payers will complain about anything that's wasted, some school officials even command their publication people to "Fill in that wasted space!"

Just like photographs and artwork, white space is a design tool that must be coordinated with all of the other elements in the publication's overall design, assuring a maximum ease of readability for the readers.

Although it's necessary only for publication designers to fully understand the make-up of publications, it is important for everyone involved with a communication program to have at least a basic understanding of the mechanics of publications so that the many uses of publications can be explored fully in the overall program.

Publications are often lumped into the shotgun option of communicating, thought of as methods that can easily reach large audiences. In fact, publications are an excellent way to use a rifle approach to communication, zeroing in on specific audiences with results that can be easily documented through quick and inexpensive readership studies.

A starting point for a typical school district might be an audit of written communications produced during the course of a single school year. The audit should consider everything, from memos to the staff and letters home to parents, to community newsletters and employee bulletins.

Even without a formal publications program, the amount of paperwork generated in the dissemination of information to all of an institution's audiences in the course of a year is tremendous.

If the audit finds that staff memos find their way to the trash cans before being carefully read, then an alternative method of reaching those internal audiences might be considered.

Except for vital information that must reach the staff immediately, routine memos might be condensed into biweekly reports, neatly designed and distributed with employee paychecks.

After the audience has a chance to adjust to the new routine, the appearance of a memo will signal an important communication.

The possibilities for internal publications can be endless.

- As employee benefits take even larger chunks of an operating budget, it's important that employees understand both the costs and opportunities the coverage offers. A simple brochure, outlining costs and benefits, that can be kept for ready-reference by employees, will do more to communicate the situation than another memo could hope to.

- Emergency medical procedures outlined on a calendar will make sure they're available year round while a memo may get lost in a file.

- A fact card, designed to fit in a wallet, will make sure that every school employee is a walking encyclopedia of information about an institution. By referring to it, he can tell a questioning neighbor exactly how many students the institution serves, what its annual budget is, how many employees work there, how old the institution is, and so on.

Along with the general community newsletter, the external publics can be served with special publications that respond to their special needs.

- No school building should be without a school publication designed specifically for the parents of children attending the school as well as the school's immediate neighbors.

- Special departments should offer publications outlining just why the departments exist. A parent called in to see a guidance counselor might at first ponder why the school needs a guidance department since nothing like it existed when he was a student. The parent is part of a special audience that could be served by a publication discussing what the department is responsible for.

- In special situations, special publications should be developed to meet the unique communication needs of the moment. During a finance election, for example, the most referred to publication of the campaign could be a simple question-and-answer document that, without preaching, simply lists the answers to the 10 most commonly asked questions about the election.

The list of possible alternative publications is limited only by the imaginations of creative school officials.

By advancing beyond the primal stage of issuing only memos, educators can find a whole new world for communicating even the most basic kinds of information vital to the operation of the institution.

The distribution of publications should not be limited solely to their intended audiences. A community newsletter should be distributed to all internal audiences as well as the community. Building newsletters, along with going to parents, should be distributed to the building staff as well as other interested staff members throughout the school district.

Special publications should always be distributed among the internal publics and any publications designed for community use should be distributed to the media. Occasionally, information from well written publications will be repeated in the media.

Regular publications should follow a predetermined schedule that an audience can grow accustomed to. A community newsletter, for example, might be distributed on a monthly basis. The audience will grow used to receiving the publication and gradually it will work its way into the readers' normal routines. Additionally, regular publications will develop a credibility that only time can produce.

A publication produced only after a crisis may be viewed with an understandable amount of cynicism. The publication is, after all, an institution's way setting its record straight. In any crisis situation, it is better to communicate information through channels that have been already been tried and accepted.

As educational services grow more complex, many institutions find themselves producing more and more publications aimed at outlining services and benefits offered by the various departments and programs.

Many educators are now responsible for actively promoting programs as well as offering them, even though their formal training provided little in the way of promotion or publication production.

Since it's in the best interest of an institution to provide publications that look and perform well in the eyes of the public, several steps might be considered to assure a quality control of publications destined for public use.

Obviously, to assure the quality of outgoing publications, the communication program should review the design and format of publications before they are published.

Part of that review should see that the publications are properly and consistently identified. Corporations usually develop lengthy policies that govern the corporate identity of published materials. Since the evolving image of educational institutions is, in part, dependent on the reinforcement its publications project, educational institutions should also follow a standard identity structure for publications.

At the Macomb Intermediate School District in Mt. Clemens, Michigan, a Board policy on identity was implemented through an employee publication designed to aid employees in designing publications. Titled The Stylebook Cookbook (copyright 1979, Macomb Intermediate School District, Mt. Clemens, Michigan), the publication contains information on basic publication planning, design, distribution and evaluation.

IN REVIEW

A large part of what educational institutions are all about is the dissemination of information. And a major way in which information is usually disseminated is through the printed word.

But whether it's by way of memo or newsletter, all of the paperwork generated by the institution should be considered a form of publication. The various methods of printed communication in use should be periodically studied and evaluated for effectiveness.

By considering the communication needs of the broad internal and external audiences, as well as the sub-groups making up each audience, written communications emerge as a crucial component in the total communication program.

Written communications are also the single method through which an institution can focus the attention of an audience while providing precisely the information it wants to get out. But the procedure is not quite that simple.

Before written communications can be sure to reach their audiences, they must be written and designed to accommodate easy reading while being presented in a regular program to build a credibility among the audiences.

APPENDICES

Chapter 5

Appendix A

NOTE: The material in this Appendix is copyright 1979 by the Macomb Intermediate School District, 44001 Garfield Road, Mt. Clemens, MI 48044 and may not be reproduced. The material is adapted from a booklet titled, "The Stylebook Cookbook" which is available from the Macomb Intermediate School District.

A "Corporate Identity"

Remember when you were little and your grandmother was always telling you, "The forks go on the left, spoons on the right"? If you were like most young children, you had trouble remembering which went where.

But sooner or later, the "forks-to-the-left method" of table-setting became matter-of-fact, and you probably recognized the importance of a well set table.

Board Policy KBEA, outlining when and where the MISD's logo, address and board members' names should appear, is as basic as "forks-to-the-left."

o Policy KBEA says simply that:

The names of the MISD Board of Education members should appear on all MISD publications that have more than one sheet of paper, except memoranda and correspondence.

The names should be placed on the inside front cover, title page, or inside back cover of publications.

The Department of Communication Services has listings of board names, in various sizes, that are ready for you to just "paste-up" on your publication.

- Policy KBEA also talks about the MISD logo and division/department/school identification in publications. The policy says:

The MISD logo, district name, address and telephone number must appear on all publications. School publications, however, should include their school name, address and telephone number instead of the MISD name, address and telephone number.

All division/department/school publications must carry the name of the division/department/school.

The MISD division/department/school name and MISD logo must be placed on the publication so that it complements the overall design.

On booklet-type publications of more than one page, the division/department/school name should be placed on the back cover. If the logo and name can't be placed on the back page, they may be placed on the inside front cover or first page of the publication.

- And Policy KBEA talks about the MISD commercial and its placement on publications to be distributed to our external audiences.

The MISD commercial reads:

> The Macomb Intermediate School District is a service organization. Its employees provide support, special help and special equipment to local educators in Macomb County's 21 school districts.
>
> About one-third of the staff serves constituent educators from the Educational Service Center at 44001 Garfield Road. Except for the staff at three Continuing Education for Youth programs, the balance of our employees work in MISD programs and schools for the handicapped.

The MISD commercial is to be placed on the same page as the board names.

Sample copies of the MISD logo, name, address and telephone as well as the names of board members and the MISD commercial are available from Communication Services. All examples are ready to be printed.

If you need any help, or have any question call Communication Services.

The MISD commercial is to be placed on the same page as the board names.

Sample copies of the MISD logo, name, address and telephone as well as the names of board members and the MISD commercial are available from Communication Services. All examples are ready to be printed.

If you need any help, or have any question call Communication Services.

Chapter 5

Appendix B

Some available headline styles...

Optima

Cooper Black

Compacta

Helvetica

Avant Garde

...and sizes

18pt. 24pt. 36pt. 48pt.

Chapter 5

Appendix C

Available composer styles

Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	CN-6-M
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	**CN-6-B**
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	**CN-10-B**
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	PR-10-M
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	*PR-10-I*
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	**PR-10-B**
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	UN-11-MC
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	**UN-11-BC**
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	*UN-11-MIC*
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	*UN-11-MI*
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	**UN-11-B**
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	UN-11-M
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	**T-10-B**
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	**T-11-B**
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	P-12-M
Macomb Intermediate School District 44001 Garfield Road Mt. Clemens, MI 48044	*P-12-I*

Chapter 6

Crisis Communication

The what caved in where and started a fire when?

At no point in an institution's history will its communication program be put to a tougher on-the-spot test than during a crisis.

Whatever the specifics of the situation, crisis communications are called for when a need exists for the immediate dissemination of information and the immediate acceptance of that information by the targeted audiences.

Over the past quiet weeks, months and possibly even years, the communication program, through its well oiled machinery, should have been routinely providing the institution with a two-way flow of information. In a time of crisis, that machinery is kicked into high gear in a sudden and concerted communication effort.

The communication methods that have been defined and refined as the program developed are called upon to respond with an importance like never before. And the credibility of those methods, that has been slowly building as the program evolved, will now pay-off with the much needed instant acceptance of information by the public.

The continually increasing dominance of the electronic media would seem to make the challenges of crisis communication easier to meet. But unless properly handled, the instant impact of those media can, at the outset, threaten to worsen the problem.

Consider, for example, the problems associated with a fire. It's mid-morning on a Monday and an elementary school building with 300 students is ablaze.

The school has been evacuated and teachers are now counting heads to assure that all students are accounted for. A local radio station learns of the fire and immediately broadcasts a bulletin. Worried parents are first to call the school, but getting no answer, they flood the switchboard of the school district's central offices. Secretaries, unaware of what's happening, have no answers. Phone lines are tied up preventing calls from getting in or out. Within minutes, parents appear at the school searching for their children. Other parents now call the radio station seeking more information. The radio station, in response, broadcasts another bulletin. More parents appear at the school along with a crowd of curiosity seekers. The crisis is in full swing.

Within minutes the school's principal has confirmed that all staff and students were safely evacuated. But it's too late to stop the growing crowd of concerned parents and building flood of incoming calls to the school system's central offices.

Although the media will be calling for all sorts of details regarding the fire, now is the time for the program's media relations efforts to go into full swing. By contacting all area media with a statement, a school official should inform the media that everyone is safe and in no danger. While it's important to get that information to reporters working with the electronic media, it should also be relayed as soon as possible to area print media as well. Although their accounts of the fire may not appear until the following day, they are likely to get telephone calls from concerned persons who can't get answers elsewhere.

At the same time, the school system's central office should be given the information. But while the first reaction might be to let the superintendent know that all is well, every employee--most importantly those answering the phones--should be given the statement. The staff in all other buildings should also be notified as soon as possible so they can adequately handle random calls they'll receive for information regarding the crisis.

Community leaders and other concerned citizens should be contacted as soon as possible with word of the blaze and the report that everyone is safe. These persons are the same ones that school officials have dealt with before on advisory committees, in neighborhood meetings, as school volunteers, and during social gatherings. Armed with the accurate story, from school officials they've dealt with before, these citizens will accept the information and be able to head off rumors and misinformation as it starts to spread.

As the fire is put out the situation slowly returns to normal, but the crisis is not yet over. After a crisis, some crucial communication groundwork can be put into place to strengthen the communications program even more.

When the crisis first hit, the big question everyone was asking was about the safety of those involved. As the crisis winds down the tougher questions will come. How did the fire start? How much damage was done? How could something like this happen? I called the central office for 20 minutes and got only busy signals. Did you people take the phone off the hook?

Again, the quickest way to get information out will be through the media. They're going to be looking for you anyway since you have a legitimate news story. As soon as possible, follow up information should be given to the media detailing, as much as possible, the circumstances surrounding the event.

Depending on the situation, several other follow up communication techniques should be springing into action. A special edition of the community newsletter, abbreviated and quickly put together, should provide a step by step account of the crisis, beginning to end. It will provide the detailed kinds of information the public should have but the media have neither the time nor space to provide.

A special publication for parents of the affected children should be in the works that will discuss what happens now. Even if specifics are not available, a commitment to returning to a normal educational process as soon as possible will soothe the worrying parents.

Collections of how well staff members performed in the crisis should be developed for eventual use in internal publications.

And the details of the crisis as it unfolds should be recorded for an evaluation of the events once all is said and done.

Obviously, this type of rapid communication involves a great deal of planning. Above all, during a crisis it's vital to remain as organized and responsive as possible to reduce the impression of confusion.

There is no single formula for successful communication during a crisis. Each crisis takes on its own identity, its own concerns, its own challenges. And not all crisis situations will have the added drama that accompanies a fire or other natural disaster.

One crisis might be brief. Another may last for weeks. One may call for snap decisions and rapid reactions. And still others, such as crucial election campaigns, allow for time to plan and coordinate communication activities.

But every crisis, as with the imaginary fire here, will take on some similar characteristics:

The Media--Although first word of the crisis might start spreading by word of mouth, the media will most likely be the big wind that fans the rumors into a raging blaze. In a good communication program, though, school officials will have worked closely with the media in the past and the media can now be called upon to promptly and efficiently assist in getting out accurate information.

The Staff--Properly trained in their communications roles, support staff fielding a barrage of calls about the situation will understand their vital roles in the situation and respond with the proper attitudes and concern.

The Community--As the rumors persist, citizens that have worked with the schools and its communication program in the past, are now also pressed into service to ward off the inevitable rumors quickly and efficiently through vital face-to-face communications.

The Follow-Up--In the first phase, the follow-up by the communication program supplies the answers to all of the questions that were left unanswered in the heat of the crisis. And in the second phase, the follow-up methodically evaluates communication performance during the crisis and recommends modifications where needed.

Occasionally, communication programs are born out of a crisis. A situation erupts and is bungled by poor communication. Afterwards, everyone agrees that weak communications added to the problem and a communication program is needed to better handle the next problem.

But in cases like this, once the heat of the moment slowly starts to cool, the fervor for a solid communication program cools along with it.

Plans are made and filed away. Communication projects slowly fade in favor of more pressing projects crucial at the moment.

A communication program should not be born out of any pressing problem the moment presents. A communication program should be calmly designed and developed with the prime objective of serving the ongoing communication needs of the institution on a day-in-and-day-out basis.

The fact that this kind of methodic communication program provides the institution with the tools to handle a crisis is, in fact, a bonus. A comprehensive communication program should be built to serve its institution on days when the biggest problem is a hornet that invaded the faculty dining room.

PR RESOURCE TIPS

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: A PRINCIPAL'S NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS

Keep the newsletter short and simple. An 8 1/2" x 11" sheet printed on one or two sides is sufficient. Make it attractive, neat, well-organized, accurate and PUBLISH ON SCHEDULE—not whenever the "spirit moves."

- Writing—Use simple words, short sentences, short paragraphs and action verbs. Avoid like the plague all educational jargon or gobbledygook. Tell your readers what they want to know, what they need to know, and in simple straight-forward language.
- ART—If you can use photographs use sharp, clear photos shot in black and white--photos that HELP to tell the story that education in your school is exciting, enjoyable and successful. If you can't use photographs try clip art (drawings clipped out of a "clip book").

SPECIAL TIPS FOR TYPEWRITTEN NEWSLETTERS:

- Use generous margins, up to about 7/8 of an inch.
- Single space the story itself and double space between the paragraphs.
- Have no paragraph longer than eight lines.
- Double space between a headline and the story.
- Triple space between the end of one story and the headline of the next story.
- Don't handletter headlines--use art transfer type available at any good art supply store.
- Use a pica typewriter. Don't use italics (except possibly for short captions), or script type.

CONTENT—PARENTS WANT TO KNOW:

- How their child is doing.
- What's taught and how.
- Special services.
- Policies—as they pertain to their child.
- How the money is spent.

DISTRIBUTION—Publications sent home with students above the fifth grade probably won't get there. Mail it—with a bulk mailing permit, costs are not excessive. Ask a parent group or PTA to help in defraying mailing costs. Set up special delivery programs with Girl Scout/Boy Scout troups or clubs in the school.

GET FEEDBACK—Don't be afraid to say "We are working hard to improve________." Enclose a tear-off coupon and/or send-back questionnaire suggesting: "I would like to know more about ___________." Make a few random calls after each publication is distributed to find out if parents have received a copy and what they think.

PREPARED BY: Kenneth J. Gelms, Supervisor of Information, Beverly Hills (Calif.) Unified School District.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: A COLLECTION OF IDEAS THAT WORK

No One Said It Would Be Easy--But It Can Be Fun!

The announcement board outside the Burbank (Calif.) High School carries special messages all year long. The principal personally handles the project with the hope that the growing non-parent population in the community will learn some things about his school. And they do:

"BURBANK HIGH STUDENTS HAD RECORD HIGH BASIC SKILLS SCORES"
"PUPIL ABSENTEEISM--OUR GREATEST PROBLEM--JUST AS IN INDUSTRY"

Traffic slows down at the corner and people admit to going out of their way to read the latest message on the announcement board.

WHERE DO YOU BEGIN? What can you do that won't cost much? What are some practical programs and activities that work? How about:

- Make schools more welcome places with "You Are Here" maps...invitations to parents when student work is on display.
- Plan some special treatment for substitutes so they'll feel wanted, needed and appreciated. Some schools use a Polaroid camera to take each sub's picture, put it up in the lounge with a welcome message, and give it to the subs with a thank-you note when they leave.
- Add a "good news" opener at the beginning of school board meetings. Superintendents take the first 10 minutes or so of each meeting with a "Did You Know" report or the sharing of "Reasons I'm Proud." They get information from other administrators and teachers for their reports.
- Communicate with "feeder" schools--sharing honor rolls, newspapers, yearbooks and the like.
- Adopt a slogan for your school or your district. The Riverside (Calif.) County Schools Office this year is going public with the slogan "Education is the fuel for the future." Others identify their districts as "Child Centered, Community Oriented"..."The Best School System West of the Mississippi"..."The School Where Every Kid's A Winner"..."Students Are Our Number One Priority."
- Have a 15 to 20 minute talk ready on your school or district that you can give at meetings of all kinds. Let it be known you're available and you'll soon be on the circuit. Many districts have found that collecting a dozen reasons each principal is proud of his or her school and adding a dozen more that are district-wide in nature provides an abundance of good speech material.
- Improve the way telephones are answered at your school of office. A "thank-you for calling Evergreen School" as a greeting is super.
- Invite district office staff out to the school sites at least once a year. It helps them feel their jobs are a vital part of the educational program.
- Set up a welcome wagon for your school or district. Use retired teachers or active parents or students as your ambassadors and have a package of information they can use on your school system as they call on new residents.

PREPARED BY: Ann H. Barkelew, public information officer/consultant, Los Angeles (Calif.) County Schools

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PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: BUILDING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN EDUCATION AT THE LOCAL SCHOOL LEVEL

There is little question that the most effective component of a school district's public relations program is at the school building level. That is where most people have personal contact with schools and where most attitudes toward school are formed.

- Have an open-door visitation policy. Invite parents and community members to school and repeat the invitation often--in newsletters, in the parents' handbook, in report card stuffers, by special individual invitation.
- Have a visitors' day for prospective students and their parents--not just for the entering class but for those at any level who may be considering attendance at your school. Publicize it well throughout the community.
- Hold a principal's coffee at the school on a regular basis to draw parents and other visitors to the school for informal discussions.
- Encourage visits and participation by nonparents.
- Hold tours for businesspersons; have a grandparents day; invite in people who live near the school.
- Encourage good news calls from teachers. Although these require willing participation on the part of your staff to be successful, you can provide basic guidelines for calls and insure that privacy and a telephone are available at convenient times during the school day so that teachers will be more likely to act on the suggestion.
- Encourage elementary teachers to summarize the events and classroom progress of the day with their students and urge them to "tell your parents what you learned at school today."
- Identify people in key locations and make a special effort to get information to them. Invite them to the school and ask for their help in communicating with and providing feedback from the community.
- Hold small, informal neighborhood meetings in the homes of volunteers led by parents or students your staff has trained to explain special programs, discuss curriculum changes and answer other questions. These are particularly helpful for parents of the entering class or newcomers to the area.
- Organize a speakers bureau of students, teachers, and administrators.
- Take classes into the community; band rehearsals or art classes at shopping centers, for example, give the public a first-hand look at how a program works.

PREPARED BY: John H. Wherry, executive director, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia

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PROJECT: TELEPHONE SURVEYS PROVIDE A HAND ON THE PULSE

One of the most effective ways of obtaining community opinions on pertinent school issues is the telephone survey. It is convenient and reaches a larger cross section of the school community than a mail-out survey. Use these steps:

- Recruit persons to serve as telephone surveyors during the school year. They can be recruited at the initial PTA/PTO meetings, at other large school gatherings, and by seeking recommendations from building principals and secretaries.
- Try to obtain a representative cross section of surveyors. Using 50 people each month and having each one survey 20 persons per month, you can cover 9,000 households in a nine-month period.
- Select a topic(s) about which you and your board of education want community opinions. Draft a set of questions in logical sequence pertaining to the topic. (No more than five questions will provide you with a quick and effective response.) Develop an answer sheet for each surveyor.
- Use a number of resources to develop your lists of contacts: student enrollment lists, school telephone directories, registered voter lists, regular telephone lists, etc. Compile a list of 25-30 names and telephone numbers for each of your surveyors each month. Depending on the topic, you might want to survey a specific segment of the school population--parents of secondary students regarding graduation requirements, or parents of elementary students regarding early childhood education.
- Instructions to surveyors should include identifying one's self as a volunteer representative of the school district and ensuring that the interviewee's identity will be held in confidence unless he/she wants to be "recorded."
- Surveyors are encouraged to jot down opinions which are given by the interviewee regardless of whether or not the comments are relevant to the specific topic. This information often forms the basis for the next questionnaire and makes the district aware of other concerns.
- The responses are reported at a monthly meeting at which the surveyors discuss their observations, criticize/evaluate the questionnaire, discuss district events and receive instructions for the next month.
- The surveys should be tabulated and results reported to the board of education and the community.

PREPARED BY: Robert Guttman, director of community relations, Pattonville School District, Maryland Heights (Suburban St. Louis), Missouri

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PROJECT: REALTORS CAN SELL SCHOOLS AS WELL AS HOMES

Very often, the real estate salesperson is the first to talk with newcomers about schools. For this reason, it is important that they have as much information about the schools as possible. It is difficult to correct bad first information impressions caused by misinformation.

One way to insure that this important group is well informed is to conduct seminars and school tours. The following points will help you set up these programs:

- Meet with officials of your local board of realtors (or whatever the local realtors' organization is called).
- Listen to what they have to say; but do not hesitate to tell them about the school system and the positive things going on there. Good public school programs help sell homes.
- Suggest that plans be made for a seminar and tours, once a "bridge" has been established between the two groups.
- Ask that someone in their organization gather questions before the seminar so that school staff members can be prepared with answers.
- Plan to hold the seminar at 8:30 or 9:00 a.m.. (Most realtors work late during the evening.) Serve coffee and donuts or a similar snack.
- Have staff members give a brief presentation about his/her area of responsibility and answer questions after a welcome by the chairman of the school board, and an overview of the system by the superintendent.
- Pass out information kits about the schools at the end of the seminar.
- Close the session at the appointed time as a gesture of good faith to those realtors who have early appointments; however, suggest to staff members that some realtors may want to stay long enough to get answers to individual questions.
- Ask realty officials for an evaluation as soon as the seminar has ended (while it is fresh in their minds).

Keep an open two-way line of communication between this group and your schools after the workshop. Make them valuable members of your "key communicators network." Ask them to call you with questions and/or rumors, and keep them on your mailing lists for district and building newsletters, special publications and invitations to participate in special events.

PREPARED BY: Samuel L. Zimmerman, director of school/community relations, The School District of Greenville County, Greenville, South Carolina

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PROJECT: PUTTING YOUR SCHOOL UP FOR ADOPTION

John J. Pershing Elementary School in Dallas sits in an older community with rapidly declining student population. However, unlike many schools which have undergone court-ordered busing, Pershing today has shown an enrollment increase and the return of more than 30 students from private schools. Officials credit this growth to the school's public relations program which includes "selling" the school product like any other business. The school has instituted a special community partnership called Adopt-A-School. Its purpose is to help provide positive educational experiences for boys and girls.

What is Adopt-A-School? Adopt-A-School is what a business, civic or community group can do to help a school meet one or more of its needs. An adopter may supply a school (or several schools) with any or all of the following:

- Volunteers,
- Sponsorship of activities,
- Funding of equipment or materials, or
- Enrichment.

It should be pointed out that in adopting a school, a group offers to help a school meet some of its needs. An adopting group is not asked to fill all of the needs of a particular school. The adoption begins when the group is "matched" with a school. The adoption continues throughout the school year. The group may renew the adoption for a longer period of time.

Listed below are some of the ways Adopt-A-School groups have been involved in Pershing and other DISD schools.

- As volunteers for individual and small group instruction in reading and language development, math, English as a Second Language, special education classes, and in kindergarten classes.
- As sponsors of activities such as orientation programs, tours, exchange visits for parents and students, get-acquainted functions, community information teams, and workshops for staff, students and parents.
- By funding equipment for a central information center in schools or school areas, printed materials, audiovisual presentations, and transportation for special events and school activities.
- By providing enrichment in the classroom through sharing with a class the volunteer's professional experiences, ethnic background, hobbies, interests or travel.
- By providing mini-courses such as a one-hour course for six weeks on topics such as computers.
- By providing activities related to career education.

PREPARED BY: Wayne Phillips, principal, John J. Pershing Elementary School, Dallas Independent School District, Dallas, Texas

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PROJECT: BRINGING COUNSELORS OUT OF THE CLOSET

Counselors have been working hard behind the scenes in our schools for years. Often parents, community people, board members, teachers, students and administrators are not well informed about the services and activities in which counselors are involved. It is time to make the public and our own school community aware of the vital services which counselors perform daily. Launch a public relations campaign now to inform people about your counseling programs.

Here are a few PR ideas and tools which you might find useful:

- Have a wallet-size card made for counselors to hand to students. One that has the counselor's name and, "I'm your counselor. Come by the office or give me a call anytime I can be of help." Be sure to include the phone number.
- Send a postcard home to parents each time a student is counseled. The card should include the student's name, what was discussed in the counseling session and the counselor's name and phone number. Make sure you include a line to parents saying, "If I can be of further help, please give me a call."
- Counselors should make positive phone calls to homes. For example, "I just spoke with your son and wanted to tell you what a terrific kid he is. It is a pleasure to help him plan his high school course schedule."
- Make your counselors more visible to students. Involve them in activities during lunch and break times. Many informal counseling sessions go on when interacting with students on a casual basis.
- Let parents know through PTA meetings and school newsletters the role counselors play in your discipline policies.
- Suggest that counselors call teachers when they have done a particularly good job with students or when a student wants to stay in a teacher's class because he/she is such a good teacher.
- Invite parents to the counseling office. Include the counseling offices in the tour on open house and back-to-school nights.
- Don't forget to utilize the local media. Suggest the education reporter write a feature article or two about counseling services.
- Develop a brochure for parents about counseling. Let them know what a counselor does, what parents should expect of counselors and what counselors expect of parents.

PREPARED BY: Terry L. McAlpine, public information officer, Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District, Norwalk, Calif.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: THE SHOPPING CENTER SCHOOL INFORMATION BOOTH

For the past eight years, the Kansas City (Kan.) Public School District has made a special effort to inform patrons about the opening of school. The annual event has become a most enjoyable and valuable activity for both school administrators and area residents.

OJECTIVES:

- To inform the public about school programs, textbooks, new equipment, and school calendar
- To answer any questions patrons may have concerning the Kansas City Public Schools
- To inform the public about Senior Citizen Activity Passes and to make the passes available to eligible persons
- To listen to concerns expressed by members of the community
- To make new acquaintances and renew old acquaintances

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

- Scheduled approximately two weeks before opening of schools
- Set up in a location for easy access to shoppers
- Manned for one week by both elementary and secondary school principals and assistant principals working two-hour shifts

PLANNING:

- "Facts" brochure designed and printed
- Shopping center contacted to schedule time (preferably to coordinate with business back-to-school sales) and to arrange for tables, display boards and telephone
- Principals and assistant principals sent letters assigning them dates and times to work at booth
- Films previewed and new textbooks selected for display
- Arrangements made with businesses in mall for storage of equipment at night
- Information signs and posters prepared
- Reminder calls made to principals
- Thank you notes sent to all persons involved at end of week

MATERIALS:

- "Facts" brochure, board meeting brochure
- New textbooks and workbooks
- Title I materials (tape player, head-set, workbooks)
- Posters, any "eye-catching" artwork by students, etc.
- 16mm projector and instructional films
- School boundary maps
- Supply lists for grades K-6
- Immunization forms
- Senior citizen materials
- Fasteners (tape, stapler, etc.)
- Telephone
- Area Vocational Technical School materials

The Back-to-School Information Booth has become a valuable public relations activity. It brings together school administrators and area patrons on neutral ground.

PREPARED BY: Bill D. Todd, principal, Washington High School, Kansas City, Kansas

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PROJECT: TRY SOMETHING POSITIVE: HAVE A SENIOR CITIZEN'S DAY!

Gallup and other polls show consistently that the persons who are more familiar with the public schools have a more favorable attitude about their schools. With this in mind, the Kansas City (Kan.) Public Schools--as a district and as individual schools--have made a concerted effort to invite area citizens into the schools for visitations. Senior citizens have been made especially welcome, and the rewards have been tremendous.

SENIOR CITIZEN ACTIVITY PASS:

The Senior Citizen Activity Pass provides free admission (except for certain events such as regional tournaments, banquets, etc.) to all district athletic events, music concerts, dramatic performances for senior citizens aged 65 years and older who live in the district. Senior citizens need only obtain the pass from their nearest school or at the board of education office. (In Kansas City, the pass was presented to many senior citizens during a week-long "Back-to-School" information booth set up in August in the city's largest shopping center.)

SENIOR CITIZEN'S DAY:

After careful planning by students and staff, Wyandotte High School invited residents from nearby senior citizen homes to visit their classrooms and to have lunch.

Principal Thomas Rhone contacted the city's housing authority for suggestions and advice and to receive authorization to present the invitation to interested residents. Three senior citizen homes were contacted and an open invitation was made. A bus was leased for transportation. On the morning of Senior Citizen's Day, student council members hung "Welcome, Senior Citizen" posters along the corridors. Students served as hosts and hostesses, accompanying the 22 visitors on the bus to school, during two morning classes, and at lunch. Students were ready and willing to help them on and off the bus, up and down stairs, and to direct them to classrooms. Class activities were not altered for the special guests; in fact, many of the "new" students soon joined in the discussions. Many took classwork home, completed it, and later returned the assignment by mail. Students were also most helpful at lunchtime, carrying trays to tables reserved for the special guests.

The guests were most grateful to have had a chance to compare today's school to the days when they attended. Positive coverage of the event was made on broadcasts from 10 stations and in feature stories in both of the daily newspapers. Since the Wyandotte Senior Citizen's Day, other schools have experienced similar successes with their own Senior Citizen's Day.

Both the Senior Citizen Activity Pass and the Senior Citizen's Day have proved to be a tremendously positive public relations activity. Try it!

PREPARED BY: Thomas J. Rhone, principal, Wyandotte High School, Kansas City, Kansas

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Classroom teachers influence the PR image of the schools more than almost any other group. Teachers need to understand and accept their PR role. Here are some specific suggestions for classroom teachers:

- Know names of students. Teachers should know the names of their students within the first few weeks of each year.
- Greet all students with a friendly hello.
- Send a note during the summer to parents of students for the new year. Or, make a telephone call to the home. Introduce yourself, extend an invitation to call with questions, and indicate that you are looking forward to having the student in your class.
- During the year, send "happy grams," or make telephone calls to note a student's improvement in academics, behavior, or attitude.
- Don't use dittos that are old or unclear. Parents are not impressed with a student's work on dittos that they can't read.
- Keep parents informed about anything new or different in the classroom--projects with extra homework, long-term assignments requiring special work and techniques such as "contract teaching."
- At the end of the class day, review with students what they have done. This helps them respond to parent's questions about "What did you do in school today?"
- Communicate in simple language, not educational jargon.
- Treat all classroom aides and volunteers with respect and appreciation. Make certain there is a real need for help and that any job is clearly defined before asking for a volunteer.
- Be alert to special classroom projects that warrant newspaper activity.
- If a student is absent for two consecutive days, call the home.
- Correct papers with comments and correction marks that can be understood.
- Never discuss other students with parents or students.
- EXTEND yourself to students who need extra help with a flexible schedule for after-school or before-school meetings. This is particularly important on the high school level.
- Don't "pass the buck." Accept the responsibility of the teacher's role as a representative of the school district and don't blame procedures, policies, etc., on administration or the board of education.
- Be informed about school issues.
- Contact parents whenever there is a problem. Contact with a spirit of cooperation to work on the problem together--not with anger or disgust.
- In meeting with parents focus on solutions, not problems.
- Have a convenient suggestion box for parents and students.
- Arrange displays of student work in the community--banks, libraries, etc.
- Start a monthly class newsletter to parents.
- Return all phone calls and respond to all notes promptly!

PREPARED BY: Shirley M. Clement, community information coordinator, Madison Public Schools, Madison, New Jersey

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY IN THE WAR ON VANDALISM AND VIOLENCE

One of the keys to an effective campaign on the mounting losses incurred by schools in the rising tide of vandalism and violence is the development of a good working relationship with the community. At the very least, everyone in the school and the community should be made aware of what vandalism and violence cost in lost education, increasing fear, decreasing faith in the educational system, increasing cost for repairs and security measures and the corresponding decrease in available funds for other necessary school services. But more than awareness is needed to combat the problem. School officials need to develop plans which enlist the aid of the entire community (students, parents, taxpayers, law enforcement and other government agencies, and the entire school staff) in battling the problem.

- Analyze and define the problem--Questionnaire after questionnaire stresses that the first step in the war must be the development of sufficient data to define the problem. This means a specific district policy on reporting ALL incidents.

- Establish a clearly defined district policy for reporting incidents complete with a standard form. Such a paper helps provide accurate information, and is of immeasurable help in explaining what actually occurred. Make sure it is sent to all personnel in the district.

- Let the community IN on your concerns. Establish either a school- or district-wide citizens advisory committee to work with you in developing plans, programs and policies that will help to reduce or eliminate the problem. One letter from a superintendent asks residents in sight of a school to help stem the rising costs of vandalism. Make your appeal personal. The letter might enlist the aid of residents in reducing "the waste of our tax dollars on vandalism."

- Encourage parents to talk with their children about the effects of vandalism and violence on their education. And encourage parents to notify the school of rumors or threats of violence that their children report to them.

- Establish a policy in which parents become financially responsible for the damage done by their children.

- Establish a good working relationship with the local law enforcement agencies. Mark all school property to facilitate recovery following a theft.

- Form a parent patrol, with school property marked with signs reading "This school is protected by community residents and the parent patrol." Under this plan, parents are encouraged to drive slowly by and around the school grounds during time periods (nights, weekends, vacations) when the premises are ordinarily unoccupied.

- Establish with the local law enforcement agency a special number which community members can call when they spot suspicious activity around a school.

- Hold a series of informal briefings with community residents on the school's problems and ask them for suggestions.

PREPARED BY: National School Public Relations Assn., Arlington, Virginia

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: KEYS TO GOOD SPEECH WRITING

PREPARE FOR SPEECH WRITING ASSIGNMENTS BY DEVELOPING RESOURCES IN ADVANCE.

- Keep a file on major educational topics and issues, such as declining enrollment and competency testing by clipping from:
  - --Educational journals
  - --Magazines such as U.S. News and World Report, Changing Times, American Demographics and local, state and regional publications
  - --Newspapers
  - --NSPRA publications
- Localize national statistics for comparison
- Develop a topical file of anecdotes, quotes, examples, etc. Take the best from collections for public speakers, clip stories from newspapers and magazines and jot down jokes and anecdotes from other speakers, TV, etc.
- Develop a file of colorful phrases and analogies.

REMEMBER THAT ORAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE ARE DIFFERENT IN NATURE.

- Written language must be ultimately intelligible to the reader. Spoken language must be instantly intelligible to the listener.
- Spoken language is more idiomatic. Otherwise, it sounds stilted and stuffy.
- Spoken language is more repetitive. It is important to rephrase key ideas you want the listeners to take away with them several times.
- Spoken language should be simpler in structure than written language.
- Spoken language is more likely to include questions.
- The length of sentences in spoken language is less uniform. Short sentences are shorter. Long sentences are longer.
- Figurative language adds life and color to spoken words. Imaginative metaphors, similies and alliteration can turn a pedestrian speech into a memorable one.
- There's also a difference in rhythm. Oral language uses more contractions. Read the speech aloud to check on flow of words and phrases and for spots which may be difficult to get your tongue around.

BE SURE TO TAILOR THE SPEECH TO THE TALENTS, TRAITS AND THOUGHTS OF THE SPEAKER.

- The language must match the style of the speaker. This means a careful observation of the personality, manner of speech, frequently used words and phrases and overall style of the person you are writing for.
- It's also important to get inside your speaker's mind--to know how that person feels and stands on various issues.
- A good speech writer who prepares speeches for the same person over a period of time will also develop a "feel" for that person's current priorities which will change from time to time. The latest priority can easily be worked into many speeches--regardless of the topic.

PREPARED BY: Wanda Vassallo, director-communications, Dallas (Texas) Independent School District

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: HOW TO DISAGREE WITHOUT BEING DISAGREEABLE: PERSONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

Most everyone agrees that school public relations deals with press releases, radio and TV specials, publications and meetings with community groups. Public relations also includes every day human relations practices of the school administrator. School administrators are constantly faced with a barrage of inquiries--many angry--from daily contacts with other administrators, teachers, parents and members of the community.

"Why?" "Why not?" "How come?" and "I want to know..." are often the opening words for a question designed to put the superintendent on the defensive or in a box.

First, remember all people have individual human needs. ALL PEOPLE NEED:

- Other people--(friends, acquaintances, co-workers, someone to interact with)
- Effective communication--(what is heard, not what is said)
- Other people in a loving relationship
- Workable concept of self
- Freedom--(to be, to think, to feel)
- Chance to be creative--(to find new solutions to old problems and try out new things)

Flanders and Amidon developed a system of Interaction Analysis which is effective in any interaction.

THREE RESPONSES--Three effective ways to respond to a complaint are:

- ACCEPT THE PERSON'S FEELINGS--You can say, "I understand how you feel," "I see you are upset," and other such statements. Such responses let the person know that you recognize he/she is upset or angry. You are not agreeing with the feelings, you are just recognizing and accepting them. It does no good to say "You shouldn't feel that way." The person does.

- ACCEPT THE PERSON'S IDEAS--By accepting the idea, like accepting the feeling, you are not necessarily agreeing. You are letting the person know what you hear. You can say "You are saying...," "I hear you saying...," or "Let me get this clear...," and then repeat what was said. Don't tell a person he/she is wrong. Say you will look into it or investigate it or get some other opinions. Most of the time, attackers just want to be heard, and half of the angry people are satisfied by having a receptive listener.

- PRAISE--Praise doesn't mean a great big gushy brag. Praise as you are interacting with someone can be a simple "yes," "I see," "go on," "uh uh," "that's interesting," or "that's unusual." Resist telling an adversary, "That's the dumbest or most ridiculous thing I ever heard." You can give praise and make the person feel better by saying, "I never thought of that!" It's true, it's so ridiculous that you never thought of it.

Administrators can disagree without being disagreeable. With a little practice, you can learn the skills.

PREPARED BY: Shirley P. Williamson, head, Office of Information, Kentucky Department of Education, Frankfort, Kentucky

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PROJECT: DEALING WITH STAFF REDUCTIONS CREATIVELY

STAFF REDUCTION: WHAT IS EVERYONE AFRAID OF?

- Loss of job
- Personal stress: physical, psychological, emotional
- Career change or "mid-life crisis," or fear of change in general
- Jeopardizing future security
- Hazards of the marketplace: out-of-date or inappropriate skills; limited perspective; fear of competition
- Necessity of uprooting
- Dog-eat-dog syndrome: "I'm for me first"
- The "nobody really cares" syndrome

WHAT ARE THE COSTS FOR THE SYSTEM?

- Lowered morale
- Depression and resentment
- Increased use of sick leave
- Lowered performance
- Staff conflicts: the "stays" vs. the "no-stays"
- Decreased student performance
- Infusion of negative feelings into classroom

HOW TO BE MORE HUMAN:

- Don't keep the necessity of reductions a secret. Get the budget picture out clearly and in timely fashion. Get together with staff and explain the whole picture, including the implications for staff cuts.
- Seek staff help in identifying constructive steps for minimizing number of staff reductions--but be realistic!
- Explain past patterns and potential for attrition offsetting impact of reductions.
- Work with teacher associations to develop plans for identifying and dealing with problems of morale, etc.
- Don't forget other employee groups who might also be impacted!
- Develop seminars, workshops, etc., on mid-career change, job counseling, etc., and spend some money on these. These could be an investment in somebody's life.
- Provide opportunities for placement information and provide information on your staff to other districts who are likely to be hiring.
- Be willing on request to write references and recommendations for your affected employees.

PREPARED BY: Mike Hickey, superintendent, St. Louis Park Public Schools, St. Louis Park, Minnesota

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PROJECT: TELLING THE SCHOOL BUDGET STORY

The Budget Process--Negotiations with employees frequently excludes the public from meaningful participation. The board of education and superintendent need to know the public's demands as well as employee's demands--before negotiating begins.

- Prepare a brochure outlining the major program improvements the superintendent believes are needed.

- Hold a public hearing before negotiations begin so citizens can react to the superintendent's ideas.

- The hearing will:

  --inform the superintendent and board, as well as the employee organizations, where the public is demanding improvements in programs.
  --permit the board and superintendent to determine, in advance of negotiations, how much of the available funds should be allocated for employee benefits and how much for program improvements.

The Budget Document--Most budgets are accountants documents--not people documents. To gain support for a budget, it must be translated from unfamiliar format and an overdependence on numbers to a narrative that shows how children will be better educated.

- Every budget, either as part of the document or as a separate companion piece, should have a summary that tells:

  --for what major items will the money be spent (i.e., employee salaries; inflation; enrollment change and other obligatory expenses; program improvements).
  --how children will be better served by the proposed program improvements.
  --evidence that past expenditures has resulted in better education, more efficient operations, etc.
  --relative expenditures for schools vs. other governmental services--especially if the proportion of tax money for education is declining.

- People will only support what they understand and agree with. Most budgets are not understandable to the average citizen and need to be translated from amounts of money to clear statements of program and purpose.

- Children are the reason that public schools exist, so all statements about the budget should be cast in terms of what the dollars do for kids.

PREPARED BY: Kenneth K. Muir, director of information, Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Maryland

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PROJECT: DEVELOPING PRIDE IN AN OLD URBAN SCHOOL

Educational opportunity is not determined by the structure which houses a school. Granted, a bright, shiny, modern building which is designed for the specific curriculum of a school is ideal. Most schools must function with less than the ideal situation. An understanding, creative approach to the problem can overcome some of the deficits of an old building. Some ideas for developing pride in an old urban school include:

STUDENT activities to develop pride:

- Develop a history of the school.
- Present an assembly to the student body emphasizing a significant aspect of the structure and heritage it represents.
- Redecorate a room (or rooms) in the building and publicize it.
- Let students plan and execute murals on the hall walls.
- Display old papers, awards, etc., from the past.
- Plan and finance a project to leave something behind to add to the history of the building. Scoreboard for the gym, audiovisual equipment, etc.
- Work with administrative, teaching staff and parents on needed improvements such as outdoor basketball facilities.
- Sponsor an alumni open-house. Encourage all age groups to take part.
- Get involved with community projects to develop positive community attitudes.
- Maintain a display case exhibiting students work and awards.

STAFF activities to develop pride:

- Encourage the use of attractive bulletin boards/and or addition of personal touches by teachers.
- Recognize outstanding academic, athletic, musical and community achievements of individuals and groups.
- Sponsor activities such as a "Clean-Up Campaign."
- Refrain from making staff complaints in the presence of students or community.
- Praise efforts of staff and students in assemblies, etc.
- Work with parent groups to offer an evening recreation program for students.
- Print a newsletter to keep the community aware of activities offered by the school.
- Develop a noon time recreation program to involve as many students as possible. Involvement increases pride.
- Use faculty meetings to discuss ways of improving self-image of the students.
- Encourage creativity and innovation among the staff. Enthusiasm from the staff is contagious.
- Speak at community affairs to explain the problems and to share ideas in improving pride.

PREPARED BY: Norma L. Winter, principal, Lincoln Junior High School, Charleston, West Virginia

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PROJECT: WAYS TO DISCOVER WHAT YOUR STUDENTS ARE FEELING

The Pupil Survey Form is an open-ended approach to discovering what students really think about their school experiences. It is designed to locate problems, interests and needs of students as individuals. Confidentiality is a must when using the form in the classroom, school officials caution. In evaluating the form, one teacher said, "The students generally answer in terms of what they really feel only if they are sure their answers will be kept confidential. It should be stressed that no one but the teacher will read the answers."

Dallas (Texas) Pupil Survey Form

1. What is now giving you the greatest satisfaction?
2. What do you like most about school?
3. What do you like least about school?
4. What is your greatest problem at the present time?
5. What are you most afraid of?

Here is your chance to say exactly what you think. You may write anything you like, but it must be just what you think.

6. Today I feel ______________________________.
7. When I have to read I ______________________.
8. I get angry when ___________________________.
9. To be grown up ____________________________.
10. My idea of a good time is __________________.
11. I wish my parents _________________________.
12. I can't understand why _____________________.
13. School is ________________________________.

One teacher noted, "It's surprising how the students open up when they are given a chance to express themselves. As teachers we need to help them deal with their feelings; the survey is a positive step in that direction."

PREPARED BY: Dallas (Texas) Independent School District

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: DEALING WITH PRESSURE GROUPS

Astute school administrators don't stop with a general identification of the school publics. They know who is actively bringing pressure against the school and who is likely to do so under various circumstances. These active and inactive pressure groups can mean positive forces for education, or they can be negative forces wreaking untold destruction on school-community relations depending on your approach in dealing with them. Whatever the approach--ignore them at your (and the school district's) peril.

TAKE PREVENTATIVE ACTION:

- Formulate fair board policies governing:
  - use of facilities
  - distribution of pamphlets and brochures
  - speakers
  - participation of students and employees in contests or promotions conducted through the schools
  - relationship of the educational system to other groups
  - procedures to be used for complaints or to request changes in curriculum, textbooks or operations.
- Set a time on the board agenda when the public may address the board. Set the time any individual may speak.
- Assist board members in methods for conducting public hearings. While the board and the administration should always listen to individuals and/or groups at such hearings with courtesy and interest, they should never engage in an exchange with those addressing the board.
- Maintain open channels of communication with all publics in a school district to to make certain that members of the board and administration hear not only those groups with limited viewpoints or who may be acting on bias.
- Provide inservice training for board members, administrators and all employees in the importance of maintaining good relationships with community groups.

BUILD COMMUNICATIONS WITH SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS:

- Encourage school employees, administrators and board members to join civic organizations and take an active part in community affairs.
- Involve members of special interest groups on study and planning committees.
- Maintain an open door policy regarding all district publics--those considered supportive of the schools as well as those considered to be negative. Critics who leave your school offices feeling they were welcomed, listened to attentively, and made to feel their ideas were of value and their opinions important will tend to accept a final decision more gracefully.

GROUP INVOLVEMENT IS THE KEY: In getting along with and gaining support from any group the key lies in group involvement. If the group is already in the process of bringing pressure on the schools, their involvement can rechannel their energies into constructive and positive forces for the benefit of the schools.

PREPARED BY: Frances Powell, director of community relations, Union School District,
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

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PROJECT: SLIDE-TAPE PROGRAMS...A SIMPLE APPROACH

The development of a slide-tape program can be a vivid, dramatic approach to communicating a message effectively and economically. The process involves selection of a topic, the manipulation of words, pictures, sounds and the blending of these ingredients into one harmonious message. Remember, there's no substitute for advance planning if the presentation is to be effective and economical to produce. Here are the steps to follow:

KEY FACTORS:

- Identify the audience(s).
- Be clear about the purpose of the project. Is it to entertain, be informative, bring about an action response...?
- Assign one person to coordinate the total project--gathering background, information, script writing, photography--the total concept.

STEPS IN DEVELOPMENT:

- Script Writing--Limit length. Keep under 10 to 12 minutes. Plan for not more than 80 frames. Use 0-30 words per frame. If the amount of narration per slide varies noticeably, and some slides have no narration at all, that's good. You've got rhythm.

- Storyboard--Make sure pictures for each frame are purposeful--planned to dramatize.

- Photographs--Conserve time and film. Use 35 mm camera. Don't shoot aimlessly hoping something will fit. Consider sources of illustrations. Schedule specific photographic sessions. Examine available slides. Make slides of old photographs, news headlines, calendar art...(Use only horizontal slides).

- Sound--Be selective in your choice of a narrator. This component may be as important as script content and visuals. As you go through the process of gathering illustrations, use a cassette recorder to capture familiar sounds that surround a scene. Add them to the appropriate place in the narration and an otherwise static scene will come to life. Include recorded comments by students, teachers, others--depending upon appropriateness to the message.

- Editing--Tighten the script and eliminate, add to, or change slides. This is the critical point in production--the stage where the pictures and sounds are blended to give the message impact.

PREPARED BY: The National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: EXPLAINING RISING COSTS IN FACE OF DECLINING ENROLLMENTS

Why do education costs rise when enrollment is declining? The community needs help in understanding this if they are expected to support increased budgets, tax increases and bond issue proposals. In Topeka, Kansas, the district business office and public information staffs worked together to develop a pamphlet for distribution to the community--parents and non-parents--which explains, in as simple terms as possible, what is happening to the school budget, what the effect will be on local taxes, and what outside forces are influencing the budgeting process.

"KEEPING THE LID ON THE BUDGET" explains each of the following factors which contribute to the rising costs:

- Inflation--This section includes a chart that shows the percentage of increase over the past five years for cost of living, the school budget and local property tax. It points out that the district has been cutting back (and tells how), but inflation is still pushing costs up.
- Highly Qualified Staff--This section points out that as staff reductions are made the more experienced teachers are retained, and they are also more expensive. However, their experience and talent provides a special bonus for district students.
- Programs--This section describes how additional programs, mandated by the state and federal government or by the community, impact on school funds. (Such programs would include education of the handicapped, gifted and talented, Title IX etc.)
- Utilities--Included in this section is a discussion of utility costs and a chart illustrating that they have doubled in the past five years.
- Building Costs--Pointing to a district-wide decline of 500 students as an example, this section explains that it takes a number of years to actually reduce even a few classrooms when that figure of 500 is spread over the 50 school buildings in the district.

DON'T FORGET:

- IMPACT OF RISING ENERGY COSTS should be documented in all community budget information presentations. Charts showing increased costs in transportation--school busing--as well as heating and cooling school buildings will be worth hundreds of words! The impact of energy costs is one which the community can clearly understand as each individual is feeling this personally.

DISTRIBUTION:

- Make certain that budget brochures are distributed throughout the school community, not merely to parents of students. Place this information in places where people gather and be certain that it is provided to the media--radio, television, and press.

PREPARED BY: Barbara J. Kudlacek, director, Public Information Services, Topeka (Kansas) Public Schools.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: USE RADIO AND TELEVISION FOR PR DIVIDENDS

People are becoming more and more dependent on the electronic media at a time when many school districts still rely almost exclusively on the press and paper to tell the school story. In the decade of the '80s it is critical that school leaders use radio and television as a dynamic source of communication--reaching every segment of the community.

GETTING AIR TIME DEPENDS ON THE STATIONS--STAYING ON IS UP TO YOU!

- Take an inventory of types of programs that you might put together.
- Make an appointment to meet with the station program directors.
- Give them a clear picture of what you can do.
- Ask and take their advice on developing programs.
- Follow instructions the program staffs give you.
- Prepare material carefully.
- Meet deadlines without fail.

DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:

How do you select materials? News stories, features, spot announcements, panel discussions, teacher demonstrations on any subject at any grade level, music, art, forensic programs, questions and answer sessions with the superintendent, board members and staff--and students--all provide program materials. Schools are a veritable gold mine resource of material designed for the listening and viewing audiences.

- Flood stations with news and ideas for features--never complain when they don't cover, just thank them when they do.
- Children are audience-getters. Use them on every program if possible, but control their conduct (schools are judged by their behavior).
- Cover every phase of the school district--professional staff and the "professional" support staff. Get the superintendent, board members and community leaders involved. Variety adds interest.
- Learn how to write timed radio spots.
- Do not ask reporters to cover events on an hour's notice. They work on assignment and need lead time.
- Avoid exaggeration, cover-up and incorrect facts--especially if it is bad news--you will have to live with it later.
- On television, variety and timing are important. Use graphs, charts and slides for a change of pace.
- Help schools spot potential news stories and features.

IN SUMMARY: Public service time is available on radio, television and the new cable TV stations if you maintain interesting quality programs and if you give the station a minimum of irritation and a maximum of quality and cooperation.

PREPARED BY: Rose Bullis, curriculum and public relations consultant, Reno, Nevada.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: CLOSING SCHOOLS

A common thread of problems runs through most school closures. Due to declining enrollment, parents recognize the need to close one or more schools, but want to close a school other than the building their own children attend. Teachers recognize the need to close schools, but do not want any teaching positions to be lost. There are ways to reduce this trauma associated with school closings:

- Develop a time-line for citizen, board and administration study with a date for recommendations and final decision.
- Organize a board-appointed, task-oriented citizens committee to collect data and report to the board regarding feasibility of school closure. The committee should include representation from each attendance area, and from parents, businesses, active civic organizations, churches, senior citizens, and other active community groups.
- Make certain everyone understands that final decisions must be made by the board of education.
- The superintendent must work closely with building principals. Their support of the final decision is essential.
- Communicate--communicate--communicate. Publicize work of the citizens committee. Publicize work of the administration. Use regular media channels and especially use building newsletters.
- Involve all district employees. Keep them apprised of the progress. The final recommendation to the board should not be a surprise to any member of the staff.
- Involve PTAs and parent or other community groups. They should be apprised of the progress and invited to make suggestions.
- Keep members of the school board apprised of the committee's progress. The final recommendation to the board should surprise no one, but be viewed as reasonable in light of serious study of all data.
- Hold public hearings. The original time-line should include time for hearings by the board in the areas being considered for closure. People attending those hearings must be assured their comments and suggestions will be considered by the board before the final decision is made:
- A slide-tape presentation of background data is helpful for all public meetings.
- Make a pin-map of student residences for visual display.
- Emphasize the fact that the greatest concern of the board and administrative staff is good educational opportunities for students!

When the decision is final start plans to close schools with "style" not strife. Seek community involvement in the use of closed schools--rental or purchase and help students and staff look with enthusiasm and pride to their new school assignments.

PREPARED BY: Howard F. Horner, superintendent, David Douglas Public Schools,
Portland, Oregon.

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PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: TURNING A NEGATIVE PRESS AROUND

Recognize the problem. Understand and accept the fact that your school district has a major problem if it is consistently receiving "negative" press.

LAUNCH AN INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE WHY ADVERSE COPY IS BEING WRITTEN:

- Personality conflicts--administration and/or board members--arrogant, defensive, aloof, or gun-shy?
- Past grudges not allowed to die?
- Is everything being kept a secret in the school district?
- Is your major spokesman for the district not being honest with reporters?
- Is someone playing favorites with reporters and/or newspaper editors?
- Do spokespersons hide from the press?
- Has there been very poor timing on your district's part in the past?
- Is there a continual refusal to provide "background information" on major issues to the press?
- Has there been an effort to "sell" educational programs contrary to public opinion?
- Do your spokespersons frequently say "no comment" on "hard" news items?
- Does the board deliberately violate the open meetings act?
- Are citizens prohibited from speaking during school board meetings?
- Is the school budget so vague that it is difficult to read and understand?
- Are community members never asked for their opinions concerning the schools?
- Is the press "barred" from invitations to important as well as routine school functions?

BUILDING A FRIENDLY PRESS RELATIONSHIP:

- Forget past frictions with the press and move to develop good relations.
- When legitimate, send a reporter a thank you note for a "story well done."
- Always be honest. Never destroy the facts to be self-serving.
- Provide reporters with background information on all stories including "hard news" items.
- When reporters call have time for them. It takes time to establish and maintain good press relations. If you miss a call, always return it promptly. Remember, newspaper persons live with deadlines.
- If a story is occasionally reported incorrectly, do not ask for a retraction or exchange hostile words with the editor. One usually loses such a battle.
- Be alert for "newsworthy" local items and provide media with "tips" and feature information when possible.
- Invite press as speakers/panelists on matters being discussed of community interest.
- At meetings, provide press table, coffee, liaison coordinator, etc.
- Rotate legal notices and ads between different papers.
- Keep executive sessions of board of education meetings at a minimum.

IT TAKES TIME TO REBUILD TRUST AND TURN YOUR NEGATIVE PRESS AROUND.

PREPARED BY: Raymond J. Garritano, superintendent, Mokena (Ill.) School District #159.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: PRODUCING A STAFF NEWSLETTER

Employees can be a school system's most valuable PR asset if they are well informed. If employees feel put down and tuned out, they will bad mouth their school system. But if they know and understand what's going on, they will communicate positive attitudes to their friends and neighbors. A STAFF NEWSLETTER can make them feel "part of the team."

WHO should get it. Every single support staff member as well as the professional staff.

WHAT should it contain? News and features—not propaganda. Staff newsletters should communicate important policy and administrative decisions and the events leading up to them, make necessary administrative announcements, and share promising instructional practices. They should "talk" about people in the system, highlighting supporting employees as well as teachers and administrators.

WRITING A NEWSLETTER THAT WILL BE READ:

- Tell the truth...ALWAYS.
- Write the way you talk. Write newspaper style, in plain English (but go bilingual where you have a bilingual staff). Write to inform, not impress. No jargon! Keep sentences short. Use plenty of interesting quotes.
- Know what your readers want. Have an advisory committee, conduct an annual reader survey, or invite a panel of readers in to critique the newsletter. Make sure all readers--administrative and supervisory staff, teachers, and support personnel--are represented.
- Edit and proofread carefully. Remember, nearly everything can be written better--and shorter.
- Don't avoid the controversial. Give employees both sides of important issues. Don't editorialize (exept in signed editorial comments).
- Get the superintendent off the front page (except in news stories). Write about important educational issues, describe exciting classroom activities, explain what happened at the board of education meeting, and report honors, awards and recognition given staff members.
- Don't overcrowd pages. Break up long blocks of type with subheads, headlines, photos, clip art, boxes--or something. Pages that are too gray (full of type) are skipped because they look like "too much to read."
- Make your staff newsletter top priority. Publish on schedule. Timeliness is critical. Even a one-page mimeographed sheet received each week can keep your staff on top of the news, and know that you care about them.

PREPARED BY: Barbara Ondrasik, Editor, Montgomery County Public Schools BULLETIN,
Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Maryland.

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PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: WORKING WITH REALTORS

What are the local schools like? What school will my child attend? These most frequently asked questions of realtors in your community can and often do make or break new residents' attitudes about "your schools" before you have sent them that first newsletter or invited them to that first program. Real estate agents and sales personnel properly informed and with a friendly, cooperative relationship established through personal contact, can be the school district's leading booster.

THESE IDEAS WORK:

- Hold a workshop for real estate brokers and salespeople to explain the district's programs, procedures and policies. Have staff members discuss busing, school finance, attendance zones, psychological services, guidance counseling, curriculum, extra curricular programs and provide an opportunity for a question and answer period.
- Plan a special breakfast or luncheon for realtors and salespeople with school administrators, members of the board of education and key staff. Include a BUS TOUR of the district--with stop-offs at an elementary, junior and senior high where they can see a school in action. (Select broadly representative schools--not just your "show-case" ones.)
- Develop a packet of materials for realtors and distribute them at the workshop or luncheon/bus tour and take them to those who did not attend. These packets should include:
  - readable maps and/or descriptions of school attendance areas
  - school policies on attendance
  - entrance age requirements
  - transportation policies
  - suggestions for parents moving into the school district; how to handle transfer of records and enrolling in the district
  - school calendar for the current year
  - pre-schools in the area (a special service)
  - information about how to get additional school information--superintendent's name, board of education meetings, etc.
  - if possible, pictures of each school with names, addresses and phone
- Develop an information brochure, fact sheet for prospective new residents for realtors to distribute. (Such a brochure should contain much of the information suggested for the packet or handbook.)
- Contact the board of realtors' in your area and ask if you can attend a meeting and suggest a speaker from the district.
- Maintain your contacts with realtors. Invite them to call you with questions and/or suggestions and utilize them as valuable feedback resources. Ask: "What questions are you most frequently asked about our schools?"

PREPARED BY: Florence Brown, public information officer, Thompson School District, Loveland, Colorado

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PROJECT: DEVELOP A MODEL STUDENT HANDBOOK

If you haven't taken a look at your student handbook lately, perhaps it' time to do so. The following suggestions will help you produce a more helpful, readable, inviting handbook.

PROCEDURE:

- Decide what you want your handbook to accomplish. In addition to providing helpful information, it can be a vehicle for promoting a positive image of your school and creating excitement for the coming year.
- Thoroughly critique your student handbook(s) as it now exists. Does the appearance make you want to read it? Is it clearly written? Is the information organized and easy to locate? Is the tone generally positive or is the book a series of "thou shalt do's" and "thou shalt not do's"?
- Ask some students and parents if they think the handbook is helpful. Why or why not?
- Meet with principals, curriculum and special project coordinators, and other appropriate staff to review content. Discuss the kind of information they think should be included in the handbook.
- Investigate the legal requirements for communicating on student rights and responsibilities, due process, equal opportunity, parents rights to student records, etc. Appropriate information on such topics should be included in your handbook.
- Organize your information under major headings, i.e., Academics, Athletics, Activities, Attendance, Grades, Rights and Responsibilities.
- Write and re-write in simple language. Make it short, friendly and positive. Talk in terms of opportunity available to students and how to make the best of it.
- Confine your rules and regulations, with firmer verbiage, to a clearly identified section. Use a more formal layout for this section to create the impression that it is "no nonsense" information.
- Include a section in the handbook that tells a bit about your school. Attempt to create interest, pride. What's special about your school and the people in it? Introduce the idea of school family. Mention exciting prospects for the coming year, i.e., special activities, new programs, new facilities. Mention any problem you may be facing and suggest how students, parents and staff can work together toward a solution.
- Use photos and/or student art in the book. They generate interest, depict school life or student work, and visually create a positive image of your school.

PREPARED BY: Maggie Beebe Bruce, director of communications, Glendale Union High School District, Glendale, Arizona.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: THE KEY TO A FRIENDLY PRESS

A "good press" with all media is essential to an effective school-community relations program. A "bad press" that consistently hammers on your school system can seriously damage it; an "understanding press" in time of crisis is essential. The "best press" comes to the school district that's developed an on-going, good working relationship with media representatives--particularly the working reporter and the decision-making editor. Such a relationship is the best guarantee of sensitive, fair and accurate handling of news.

NEWS MEDIA RELATIONSHIP BUILDERS:

- Learn all you can about the news media's needs: operation, deadline, services and particularly the working reporter and the editors. Read the paper, listen to the radio and watch the television programs so reporters will sense you are knowledgeable about their media.
- Consistently feed the media ideas for stories, being very careful to let the editors decide what to cover.
- Respond promptly to reporters' requests for information. Don't stall them to write out a prepared statement unless it's absolutely necessary.
- If the reporters can't do the story, offer to do it for them.
- Schedule interviews at the best time for the reporter and those to be interviewed. Check signals the day before to be sure that everyone is ready.
- Don't ask to approve a reporter's story unless to check facts.
- Ask when a story will be used so you can alert others to read and watch it.
- Tell reporters when a story is good--in writing with a copy to his boss.
- Know the deadlines and release the story so all or most of the media will get it for use at the same time.
- Invite the reporter and editor to school--for a school lunch, to talk to teachers or principals or have a conference with the superintendent.

AN ON-GOING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRESS IS VITAL. Every school district faces the story that "hurts." Here are some suggestions when reporters call for the facts on the "ouch" story:

- Remember when a reporter calls for details on this kind of story, he/she intends to write it. A terse "no comment" won't stop the story and will probably provoke the reporter.
- Give all the balancing (your side) information and, hopefully, the first paragraph and headline will carry this.
- Don't lecture the reporter on how this story will hurt education. He/she has an assignment.
- Don't say anything "off the record." What you tell the reporter is on the record.
- Don't volunteer any observations. Answer questions directly and completely.
- Treat all media alike. If the newspaper reporter initiates a "scoop," don't give the story to any other media.

PREPARED BY: Anne Lewis, Executive Editor, EDUCATION USA and EDUCATION USA Special Reports, National School Public Relations Assn., Arlington, Virginia.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: ANNUAL REPORTS...A VITAL PART OF YOUR PUBLICATIONS PROGRAM

The annual report should be regarded as an opportunity to interpret frankly to parents, community, and staff the school district's goals and programs. It should be viewed as one element of a unified communications program. It is essential that content, style, format and design capture and stimulate reader interest and provide the reader with the kind of information desired in the form he/she wants it. The report should relate to the audience.

PLANNING:

- Use a survey to determine interest in format and what kind of content may be desirable. Informal approaches will work. Simply ask parents and others what they would like to know about the school district or if there are any aspects of the operation which they don't understand fully.
- Discuss the objectives and role of the annual report with a planning committee to define theme, concepts and elements in the report.
- Develop a theme. Attempt to tie the report to issues or events of public interest that relate naturally to the school district's goals.

CONTENT/STYLE:

- Selection of the format should always follow the determination of objectives and nature of content of the report.
- Provide forward-looking information, such as plans and forecasts, in addition to past data.
- Personalize the report. This approach will increase believability and readership.
- The report should address problems and respond to new developments and new public concerns with relevant data.
- The number one goal should be clarity and readability.

FORMAT/DESIGN:

- The cover is the most graphic element of the annual report. It should entice the reader into opening and reading the report.
- Use large photographs--chiefly of students--and clear, readable graphics.
- Financial data should be treated in easily understood graphics.
- Overall design should strive to develop a theme.

FEEDBACK:

- Develop a method of getting feedback on the impact of your report on parents, staff, and community residents.

PREPARED BY: John Butterfield, Office of Information Services and Publications, Worthington City Schools, Worthington, Ohio.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: KEY (COMMUNITY) COMMUNICATORS

School district crises requiring special communications efforts can range from employee labor negotiations and strikes, student disturbances, and school closures, to financial and budgetary problems, serious rumors, and any number of other dilemmas confronting public schools. Any crisis can occur when a district least expects it. Therefore communication to a district's publics must be swift and credible. A "network" of individuals within the community who can quickly disseminate accurate and supportive information regarding the schools to other members of the community can be formed in any school district, if the right people are chosen.

- A Key Communicator is an individual who is listened to in his or her circle and is believed by most of the members of the circle.
- Key Communicators must be generally supportive of the school district. Even during times of extreme tension, they will always be more supportive of the school district than of narrow, fragmented causes.
- Key Communicators can be PTA leaders, school volunteers, retail clerks, chamber of commerce officers, barbers, beauticians, dentists, doctors, lawyers, trade union leaders, prominent businessmen, industrialists, senior citizen leaders, and mass media officials. And, they can also be neighborhood leaders, housewives who are talkative in their block or building, little league coaches, and others who have the two essential traits.

FORMING KEY COMMUNICATOR GROUPS--Every school district superintendent, administrator, principal, support personnel supervisor, school board member, and school public relations person should have his/her own Key Communicator group.

- A superintendent's group could be comprised of a few compatible people in the community who face similar problems in private industry and other forms of government--plant managers, county commissioners, owners of businesses--and others responsible for large numbers of employees and large budgets.
- A principal should solicit for membership in his/her group those individuals in the neighborhood school community who are the most supportive of the district, and who are respected by their neighbors.
- School PR people should invite media representatives and private industry PR people to make up a group. A school transportation supervisor could utilize private bus company managers and the food services coordinator could seek the counsel of restaurant and institutional food service supervisors.

Compile the names and addresses of all Key Communicators for a master district-wide mailing list. Each should receive a regular, factual publication of the official actions of the district. Give them enough information so they'll never say: "You never tell us anything about what's going on with the district."

Each group should have informal, occasional meetings. Listen to their suggestions, share problems, heed their good ideas. They'll feel that they're an important part of their local public education system. And, you'll have a "network" of supportive and understanding people.

PREPARED BY: Gordon Shaw, public relations consultant, Portland, Oregon.

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PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: USING YOUR BOARD MEETINGS AS A SHOWCASE

Members of local school boards often express disappointment with the attendance of public and press at board meetings. Often the routine and even the petty seem to dominate the meetings, so that the board has little time to seek an overview of the district or to consider basic educational concerns and issues. Perhaps it is time that board and administration together planned meetings that are more intellectually challenging, interesting and satisfying to all participants. Properly managed, these sessions need only take 30 minutes.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS TO CONSIDER:

- Awards such as trophies, plaques and certificates presented to students for academic, athletic or other achievements.
- Staff members who have made outstanding contributions or achievements presented with certificates of commendation.
- Anniversaries and retirements of staff acknowledged with certificates--reception after meeting.
- Staff presentations on major educational issues or status reports on programs in the schools.
- All persons who have volunteered their services during the school year honored at a meeting with certificates of appreciation.
- Student presentations and performance reports. Exhibits of student work set up for meeting. Responsible students invited and introduced.
- Senior citizens invited to a board meeting--perhaps one which features adult education offerings available for them.
- Special reports prepared by PTA, band parents organization, booster club or departments of the district such as librarians or science teachers.

GUIDELINES:

- Standards for these programs should be set high at the outset.
- The public should be encouraged to participate. Even if your schedule will allow only a 30-minute presentation, ten minutes should be set aside for questions and comments.
- Involve as many students and staff members as possible.
- Always invite the relatives and friends of participants as well as representatives of community organizations that might be interested in the topic.
- Always invite the staff advisor, coach or teacher to introduce the student and explain the award or program.
- Publicize programs and events thoroughly in advance and seek coverage whenever possible by the media--press, radio, TV, and cable TV.

Invite local organizations (League of Women Voters, chamber of commerce, etc.) to send a regular representative to your board meetings. Provide these representatives with advance materials on your meetings.

PREPARED BY: Lenore Greenberg, director of communication, New Jersey School Boards Association, Trenton, New Jersey.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: HUMANIZING SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR THE COMMUNITY

Community residents, parents of handicapped students, and parents of students without handicaps are all interested in a district's special education programs. This interest ranges from common concern for all students, to costs, to the impact of the program on school operating costs. This interest dictates the establishment of a well-planned communication effort about special education.

STEPS NEEDED:

- Establish guidelines about the type of "publicity" that is appropriate and desired by talking with the special education director and staff, other district administrators and teachers, and parents of both handicapped students and those without handicaps.
- Know the state and Federal laws which affect special education.
- Know the meaning of terms connected with special education and publish definitions of this information for your total staff, parents and community. For example: what's the difference between learning disabled students, educable mentally handicapped, retarded, etc. These distinctions may seem cold and abstract, but they matter to parents and staff.
- Humanize, but don't sentimentalize when writing about special education programs and students. Treat them with the same amount of respect, emotion and intelligence that you do all other programs.
- Encourage teachers to invite other staff members, and when appropriate, parents and community residents, to visit special education classrooms or classrooms with special education students, on specific occasions. Many teachers have found that using their special education students as hosts for these events gives them valuable social experience and gives visitors a new empathy with these young people.
- Other students who have worked with special education students as part of a mainstreaming effort can be excellent spokespersons on television, radio, or in articles. One fifth grader who worked with mentally retarded students at his school said on a recent TV program: "I was surprised to find that even though they can't do quite as many things as I can, they're just like me in a lot of ways and can be my friends."
- Include news items about special education classes and activities or individual student profiles as part of the on-going school and/or district media release program.
- Develop a special district newsletter for parents of handicapped students. Seek parent volunteers to help you with the project and/or solicit suggestions of concerns, helpful hints, etc., from parents to share with one another in the newsletter.
- Hold special sessions for parents of handicapped students to provide them with help from education and medical experts as well as an opportunity to share their concerns and seek ideas from other parents facing similar problems. Remember to schedule sessions at different times to accommodate working parents: some in the morning, some in the afternnon and evening and some on Saturdays.

PREPARED BY: Jill Griesing, director of communications, Westside Community Schools, Omaha, Nebraska.

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PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: THE BASICS AND THE COMMUNITY

Much has been written about the "back-to-basics" movement that is sweeping schools in various parts of the country. But the fact remains that most school systems never left the basics. The community wants and needs to know what is being done in every school. They also want to know how it is being done.

FIVE MAJOR CONCERNS OF PARENTS:

Parents in your community want to know:

- How my youngster(s) is doing in school (Progress)
- What you are teaching him/her (Curriculum)
- What special services you are offering (Enrichment)
- What are the rules (Policies)
- How much does all this cost (Budget)

Take advantage of every possible opportunity to address these concerns. You are probably doing a better job than the public thinks.

LEADERSHIP TIPS TO TELL YOUR STORY:

Below is a list on some ideas that you can start using today:

- Weekly Progress Reports--send home a folder of student work with every elementary student every week. Have each teacher write a short note to the parents. Explain what students did that week.

- Newsletters--use your weekly/monthly menu sheets or parent newsletters to explain the special programs at your school. Help people to understand what's going on in the classroom. Explain your rules about attendance/absence. Tell parents everything that you can about the budget. Or tell them where they can get more information.

- School-Community meetings--use your PTA/parent meetings to explain how you are meeting the special needs of the students. If your test scores aren't the best, tell parents what you are doing to improve them.

You are an educational leader. Exert your leadership! Tell the community everything you can about your school program. Show the community your commitment to success. Communicate to the community that you are all working together for the same goals--providing the best possible education for all students.

REPARED BY: Paul F. Rhetts, public information officer, Howard County Public
Schools, Columbia, Maryland.

BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: GETTING AND KEEPING PARENTS INVOLVED

- Parents need to know you really want and need their help. Sending out a notice saying that may not be convincing. Personal contact works lots better. It is more difficult to say no to a telephone request than it is to one presented on a crumpled paper carried home by a child. Furthermore, this personal contact can help insure a broadly based committee instead of one comprised of the people who volunteer for everything.

- Parents need to know the scope of a committee's charge, the time commitment expected of them, and that what they are doing is important to the school and their children. This should be included in the recruitment effort to attract members.

- Parents need to be convinced that their services/advice/recommendations will be thoroughly considered when ultimate decisions are reached.

- Parents need to feel that their efforts are appreciated. In addition to a simple thank you, show concern about TRANSPORTATION and CHILD CARE for meetings. Publicize names and committee appointments, plan appreciation dinners or other activities, include members' photos in yearbooks and/or news articles.

- Parents need to understand process skills used for decision-making. Not all parents have the tradition of reaching group decisions and the processes necessary to accomplish this. If parents are expected to be true partners in decisions, the process (and the administrator) should not be allowed to intimidate or dominate them. Prepare everyone for mistakes, broken communications, upsets, setbacks, temporary lags in action.

SOME SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE NEEDED:

- Not all parents had a happy experience with their own schooling and may need strong encouragement to return to a school building.

- A more neutral setting than a school may work better--church, etc.

- Language may be a problem--some parents feel that they do not express themselves well and will be further intimidated by "educationese--jargon".

- Non-English or limited English speaking parents face other barriers. Send invitations out in the language they use or have a person call them who speaks their language. Be sure to have bilingual people at all meetings so that parents can express themselves in the language they speak.

- Some parents expect immediate solutions or quick responses to recommendations. It may be wise to provide some skills in group decision making or divide the work or areas of concern into small sections so that success can be seen in some areas while others continue to be studied.

PREPARED BY: Doris Payne, communications consultant, San Francisco, California.

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PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: HOW TO COMMUNICATE (LOBBY) WITH YOUR--State Legislature, and/or City, County and District Representatives.

Effective Relationships--with legislators and/or representatives should begin long before you need help solving a problem. It should be an on-going program.

- Establish a plan for orienting new legislators.
- Keep them informed of significant changes in services your schools provide students, parents and the community.
- Know the legislator's staff members and keep them informed.
- Be certain that your legislators are on the district mailing lists for community and building newsletters, and invitations to special events.

PROCEDURE:

Remember You are Selling An Idea. You have a short time to capture their attention.

What they see/hear--is what you get.

- Be concise.
- Give direct answers; don't cloud issues.
- Remember that the public relations potential of your efforts will probably be determined within the first minute.

Use the "KISS" Principal.

- "Keep It Super Simple." Being long-winded will hurt your case.
- Use "lay" language; avoid educational jargon.

Get the Message Across EFFECTIVELY.

- Try to always have a one-page summarization of any material you discuss.
- First, clearly state what you want.
- Second, provide the rationale/explanation/statement of the problem.
- Present concepts in the simplest manner possible.
- Don't assume that the legislator is familiar with your problem.
- Use graphics--simple charts to illustrate major points/concepts.

Get the Facts Straight.

- Always do your homework; be prepared.
- Don't fake an answer. If you don't know, say so. (But find out.)
- Don't attempt to overpower with your knowledge of facts.

Maintain a flexible position.

- Remember that the art of politics is compromise.
- Always try to see the big picture.
- Recognize that each legislator has many different and diverse constituencies--and he/she may also have to sell your idea to others.

PREPARED BY: Dr. Calvin W. Hall, assistant superintendent, Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, Downey, California.

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PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: THE SUPERINTENDENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (THE ADVISORY COUNCIL)

A community advisory council puts the superintendent into contact with patrons in the community who hold leadership positions. Such councils can be a positive mechanism for two-way communication between the administration and the community and serve as a basis for on-going support. The following tips will help:

- Get board approval to establish the advisory council. Clearly define your purposes for making the recommendation, what you hope to accomplish and how you perceive the board's relationship to the committee.
- Develop guidelines for the committee, its purpose, function, and relationship to the district's decision-making process.
- Provide for annual renewal and membership replacement of the advisory council. Candidly state the participants' duration of appointment before final selection is made.
- The make-up or mix of the council is extremely important. Carefully evaluate your goals and problems and balance the group selection.
- Involve school personnel in the process. They will reinforce the team approach to problem solving.
- Reinforce how the advisory council can help achieve the district's goals for students. Cultivate its ability to generate community support for schools.
- Be open and receptive to the council's comments.
- Remember an advisory council is not a decision-making body.
- Utilize the group to correct misinformation or rumors in the district. The advisory council provides a good forum for citizen education.
- Arrange meetings well in advance at convenient times and places and publicize the group's activities.
- Help to provide structure for the committee. Participants generally have little background knowledge and will need direction and assistance before they feel secure in expressing themselve.
- Encourage the committee to discuss their role with other citizens and to assess community thinking. Information must be gathered in a systematic way and be organized in a usable and understandable form.
- In times of crisis, your rapport and personal credibility with the advisory council will see you through.

PREPARED BY: Bill Hodges, superintendent of schools, Western Heights School District, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN A SMALL DISTRICT

Gain support of the school board for an organized school-community relations program. It is not a luxury, but a necessity. There will be a school-community relations program in your district--it is best that it is an organized school program.

- Assign someone to full- or part-time responsibility. This may be the superintendent, an administrator, a teacher or lay person (volunteer).
- Use a three-prong approach:
  - Internal--within school--faculty and staff.
  - External--residents within school district area.
  - External--outside of school district
- Set up a program of "What To Do"--newsletters, media releases, etc.
- Encourage staff to become school-community relations conscious--emphasize that they must "tell it like it is." Don't use smoke screens--not all things that happen in schools are good--but you must inform your publics.
- Have an ongoing program, not a crisis-to-crisis approach, not just when you think you need help to pass bond issues, levy referendums or for budget hearings.
- Encourage staff members to be an active integral part of the community.
- Be certain schools are available for community use and provide programs for all age groups--preschool to senior citizens.
- Recruiting, correspondence and telephone answers are often times the only contact people have with your district. Be certain the impression left is favorable.
- Work closely with your media. You must get along with them. No choice!

THINGS TO DO:

- Staff newsletter
- Golden pass (senior citizens)
- Recruiting brochure
- District fact sheet
- Board of education brochure
- Weekly student radio program
- School facilities map
- Letter in newcomers packet
- Faculty advisory council
- Fillers for newspaper on school facts
- Monthly calendar of events in pay envelopes and other key community places
- Faculty-grams--notes to staff members on good work
- Districtwide newsletter
- Staff thank you notes
- Staff directory
- Retirement certificate
- Baby card (a desk will be ready in five years)
- Newspapers to new staff members
- Clipping congratulatory note
- Feature/week in newspaper
- Flyer-grams (notes to parents on work of child)
- Building staff breakfasts
- Faculty pot luck dinners
- Christmas cards to administrators and buildings

REMEMBER--THE SCHOOLS ARE NOT MINE OR YOURS. THEY ARE OURS!

PREPARED BY: Norman B. Maguire, executive secretary, Minnesota Assn. of School Administrators, St. Paul, Minnesota.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: PARTNERSHIP FOR PROGRESS...BUSINESS LEADERS IN THE CLASSROOMS

By inviting businesspeople into the schools as volunteers, students benefit from contact with successful role models while the volunteers become more knowledgeable and consequently more supportive of the schools.

- Invite the joint sponsorship of the chamber of commerce. Proposal may be introduced to the education committee and subsequently approved by the chamber board.
- Recruit volunteers from the list of chamber members. An introductory letter followed by telephone contact by the superintendent will insure few negative responses.
- During initial contact, explain the concept (repeating facts in the letter), and ask for a commitment of one hour each week for a limited number of weeks, and have the volunteer indicate the day and hour he/she prefers.
- Obtain from principals the names of teachers who would like to participate.
- Establish school assignments for volunteers and teachers.
- A "Thank you for agreeing to serve" letter to volunteers should include schedule and assignment. Principals should receive a schedule/assignment list which includes the volunteers' addresses.
- Plan a kick-off breakfast for volunteers, principals and a teacher representative from each school. Following the breakfast, volunteers tour the school to which they have been assigned and meet the teacher they will assist.
- Conduct an orientation session for volunteers/professional staff to make volunteers more secure about their roles.
- Monitor the program through the principal.
- Following completion, have teachers, principals and volunteers evaluate the program.
- Conduct appreciation activities including thank-you notes from the superintendent and principals.

Be sure you build feedback into the program to provide for suggestions and comments from the business partners as well as from the teachers and principals involved. You will also want to alert the media to the program and invite not only their participation, but coverage of the various activities.

PREPARED BY: Sandra Frye, director of community relations, High Point Public Schools, High Point, North Carolina.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: INVOLVING NON-PARENTS IN YOUR SCHOOLS

According to recent statistics, approximately two-thirds of the adult population in the United States do not have children in school. As non-parents, these adults often have little reason or opportunity to be aware of what's happening in our classrooms. How can you reach non-parents? How can you get them involved in your schools? How can you gain their support and understanding? One of the ways is to turn them "on" to COMMUNITY EDUCATION! What's in it for them!

- Seek Their Advice: Involve your community in the decision making process by forming and sponsoring citizen advisory committees, planning committees and/or evaluation teams and making certain that non-parent community residents are members.
- Give Them Some Space: Schools belong to the community. Encourage residents, community groups and agencies to use school district facilities. Set up policy and procedures for using school buildings. Establish a reasonable fee schedule to cover costs such as heat, lights and custodial help. Let your community know that the school facilities are available and keep a master calendar of scheduled building use to eliminate confusion. Send out periodic media releases about community use of school facilities.
- Cater To Their Needs: Community education programs can be geared to meet the needs of specific groups in your community.
    - SENIOR CITIZENS can be provided daytime classes, special trips or programs, golden age cards, meals, school visits and tax information.
    - SINGLE PARENTS are receptive to classes that will teach them about child care, financial planning and how to cope with new situations (separation, divorce, death in the family).
    - ADULTS WHO WANT TO LEARN A NEW JOB, or who wish to enter/re-enter the work force, can be offered classes to meet their needs.
    - SMALL BUSINESSES within your community may need to educate and/or retrain their present personnel and you can assist with needed programs.
    - GENERAL CLASSES can be provided in areas such as metrics, speed reading, management skills, accounting, athletic and recreational crafts.
- Offer Them Work: Use your community as a resource for staffing community education programs. Recruit potential instructors through newspapers, school newsletters, businesses and community agencies.
- Appeal to their Talents: Using the talent resources within your community can be mutually rewarding for your schools and for adult residents. Make an appeal to those people in your community who would be willing to share with students a specified talent, hobby, unusual travel experience or career information. A resource bank of this information can be made available to each school.

PEOPLE WILL HAVE MORE PRIDE AND INTEREST IN THEIR SCHOOLS WHEN THEY ARE PART OF IT.

PREPARED BY: Philip H. Schoo, superintendent, Forest Hills Public Schools, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: CRISIS COMMUNICATION--How to Deal With A Disaster Before It Happens

Are you prepared? Do you have guidelines and handbooks for school administrators with the line of authority and procedures clearly spelled out? The key which holds the pieces together during any crisis is the way that everyone involved understands and deals with the situation at hand.

A CRISIS/DISASTER PLAN SHOULD ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

- How will the district (schools) receive notice of the disaster? Who tells whom? Is this line of authority clearly specified?
- How will the information be given to other administrators, board members, teachers and students--parents and community residents? What are plans if power is out and no buses available?
- What are the strategy plans in case of fire, riot, earthquake, nuclear attack? When does the school responsibility end?
- How will parents be informed of emergency school dismissal? Are radio and television stations sufficient? Are safeguards established to make certain incorrect information is not reported?
- What are plans for utilizing police and fire departments in emergencies? Which conditions exist before help is summoned? Can anyone call without clearance? What is the line of authority?
- Does the district provide copies of a Crisis/Disaster Handbook and Principal's Checklists for every school building.

GENERAL GUIDELINES TO INCLUDE IN CRISIS/DISASTER PLANS:

- Take care of the disaster situation first, protecting human welfare, and then deal with the communication aspect.
- Designate the person who is spokesperson for district and local schools. The spokesperson must have all the information available on an event-by-event basis.
- Maintain a strong, on-going communications program in the district and at each school building. This is the foundation for long-range success.
- Build a good personal/working relationship with the news media based on honesty and mutual respect; the less formal the better.
- Keep your cool at all times by showing genuine feeling for the human factors involved in the disaster; be cool--not cold.
- Talk with all people involved in the disaster before making any assessment and/or public statements; don't depend on secondary sources of information.
- Consider everything you say to the press as "on the record" and don't ask for "off the record" privileges; avoid "no comment" statements to the press.

PREPARED BY: Don Johnson, principal, Capital High School, Boise Public Schools, Boise, Idaho.

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

PR RESOURCE TIPS

PROJECT: BRING SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS INTO YOUR SCHOOL FAMILY

As a group, bus drivers are one of the school system's most important, and often neglected publics. Bus drivers are considered one of the most reliable sources of school information by their neighbors and friends in any school community.

PROCEDURES:

Conduct an annual orientation program at the start of each school year for all transportation personnel--bus drivers, maintenance workers and adult crossing guards. Make this a priority program with top district administrators on hand to discuss programs and plans for the year. Provide a question-and-answer opportunity and be sure to stress the role these key people play in the day-to-day image of the district. Daily their "yellow billboards" pass through the streets of the community carrying its most precious possessions--the children.

- Appoint a committee of bus drivers, parents and students to develop Bus Riders Safety Guidelines. Make certain the guidelines are adopted by the board of education, widely distributed and posted on all buses.
- Promote opportunities for bus driver recognition: driver of the month, an annual driver rodeo, etc.
- Adopt a driver's badge--one that incorporates an appropriate design and the driver's name--a status symbol to be worn with pride.
- Feature transportation news regularly in school and district newsletters and releases to the media.
- Incorporate transportation and safety--as well as the people who do the job--as "regulars" on the agenda of staff meetings and inservice sessions.
- Include a section on bus transportation in parent and/or student handbooks and emphasize the responsibilities of those that ride the bus. Produce a special brochure on transportation and safety guidelines for district distribution.
- Suggest that teachers cooperate with the transportation department and feature safety as part of classroom instruction. Encourage creative classroom projects centered on bus safety themes.

Ask teachers to:

- release classes on time at the day's end to avoid needless, unsafe student rush for the bus.
- clip or staple student papers together, particularly for younger students. Loose papers dropped by students getting on or off buses are a leading cause of bus-related accidents.
- emphasize to students the driver authority on a bus and reinforce positive students' attitudes.

BRING BUS DRIVERS INTO THE SCHOOL FAMILY AND THEY'LL CARRY THE WORD AS WELL AS YOUR KIDS!

PREPARED BY: Andy Olsen, director of the Department of Communications, DeKalb County Schools, Decatur, Georgia.

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